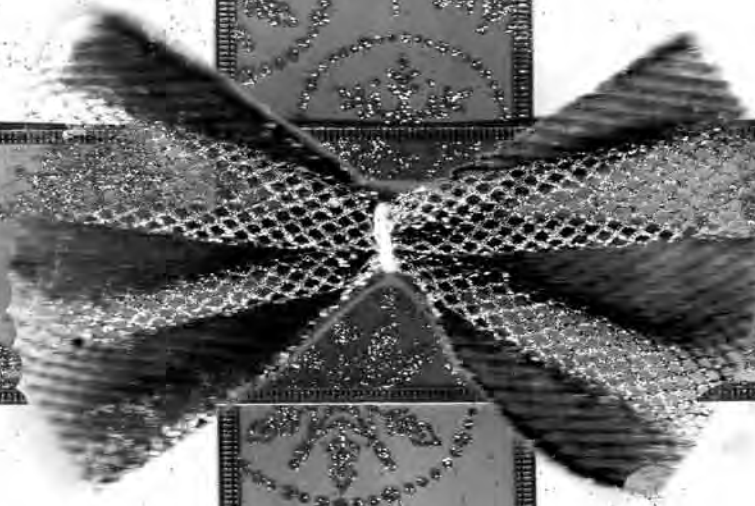


The Cénacle

FIRST CLASS MAIL





Geese appear high over us,
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
as in love or sleep, holds
them to their way, clear
in the ancient faith: what we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye,
clear. What we need is here.

--Wendell Berry

December 25, 2013
12:09 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Driftwood Table
Melrose, MA.

Dear Jim,

I begin this letter with uncertain pen, addressing you, my brother, passed now two years. Writing to you, thinking of you, powerful in my mind, sad, melancholy, but good, always good. What of you resides in me tonight makes me gladder & the world better, still.

I'm thinking of the Jellicoe Literary Guild tonight, for hours, for many days recently. This coming weekend, the 25th anniversary meeting. 126 of them now. You were at 100 of them by your last in October 2011.

Since then, we've begun every meeting with "flashbacks," bits of audio from previous meetings. Usually of people at present meeting, if they've come before. Always one of your songs. Always. I want even people who never met you to hear your voice, listen to you play & sing.

moved to Rec Room

I'm now in the pretty basement room where these meetings have been held since this year. A long room, with its chairs & couches, picture postcards on the wall, Wizard of Oz poster framed & hung from the bricked wall where the fireplace roots from above.

You never saw this room, or this house. You would have liked both, amazed with me that I found such a good wife to buy such a good place with. I would have joined in every minute of any visit you made here. Has to be by dint of my imagination, as it turns out. I think even now you're more accepting of your passing than I am. You fought less than I shall do against the fundamental forces of life. "Just play," you'd say. Just play. Stream I smile. Sny

A long room. Like the old brown-paneled back room at Roma Restaurant down in New Britain. Central Connecticut, middle of nowhere.

And yet. And yet. Eight Saturdays of the year, for 13 years running

-6-

1988-2001, we took the back room of that working class bar & turned it into something magical, conjured music, poetry, fiction, art, laughter, sometimes chaos, to those obscure environs. We showed up, near a dozen strong in the best years, with our guitars, notebooks, sketch pads, our crowd stretching around two long tables, several pitchers of beer going at any time, countless food Roma pizzas & subs, & we turned the place into a live cauldron of art.
We magicked the place.

Bergeron & his stories of old moralizing men.
Dillon, & his hot blooded in space.
Shoutelle & his carnal mystic yawns.
Burke, you, Burke, & your art-stored
high beautiful musical lightnings.
Amante & his red wine caterpillars to
any sympathetic Gosh left listening.
Ciccone & his hardworking tales of love,
laughter, & suffering.
Sealand & his well-dressed demons &
bastards in out of tune.
And so many more. So many

-7-

Our lives were volatile. We were all working class, college-educated & then thrust into the maelstrom of it all to function, use that learning or don't just make that living & pay that rent.

Mostly young men, often without lovers to soften our moods, most of us drank hard on the weekend. Pushed each other, too, drinking a bond of brotherhood. Till it got loud, till it got violent.

There were meetings when it was a joy to be together, to see the familiar faces as they bounded up the three steps from the bar & into the back room for their welcome. Laughter, roaring happy laughter. Nights when the poetry was endless, the long stories, the songs. Drinkers from the bar peering in, wanting a little of the magic too.

Less of that as the years went on. Around the time I started The Oracle, in 1995, the group began to fragment.

But, Jim, you believed in this group, its idea, as much as

-8-why
I did. You got it ~~when~~ ^{why} I would come
down from Boston, Cencules binded
& in hand, boombox to record every
meeting on cassette. You know
this project was unique special.
You stood by me all the years I
hosted it.

We saw it crumble, as people
fell away, as Roma was bought out
by someone who eventually jettied
our beloved brown-panelled back
room, & turned the whole thing into
a loud, stupid, ugly sports bar. You
were there in 2001, 12 years ago,
when we sat at a table in the front
room, ending it. 13 years & done.

Then, 7 years later, 3000 miles
away, I revived it. Whole new set
of people, same idea. From 2008 to
2016 in Portland, Oregon. You came
once, via telephone. This crowd of
people listening to you & your guitar,
conjuring up Roma, & those 13
years. I'm very glad that happened.
I'm glad Kass saw your commitment
to the memories, & the continuance.

-9-
Finally, joy of joys, moved back East & I ~~meets~~ ^{met} you could get to again. You came to every single one. You played guitar anew, & sang & accompanied my reading. You met Lassi & new people & old. You lent your large spirit to it all again.

I'm sorry your last time coming worked out so poorly. I didn't really know how bad your health was, how tired your body was, how soon it was to fail you entirely, a month after I last saw you end of October ~~2015~~. I didn't know.

And so much of this is sad, yet you were not a sad person. You were, in fact, one of the happiest people I've ever known. So I cannot end this letter to you with regrets.

Instead I'll summon a memory of a winter's night, snowy, yet roads passable. Perhaps Shorette has picked me up at the Greyhound bus station

-10-

in Hartford. He's full of his kind of
folk, about hockey & politics, & poetry.
We drive to a Walgreen's so I can
get cassettes to record the meetings
& batteries.

Rona's parking lot is full but
we find a spot. Go in the side door
most used. The full dark-bearded
owner, Polish dude named Alex, nods
to us as we enter, dubious of us
but not our wallets full of cash
for booze. The joint decorated
in electric lights & Santa Claus
posters.

The back room. Dillon shows,
curly-haired, eyeglasses, ready to
roll. Emerson, tall, thin, handsome
smile, jittery soul. Mark Bergeron,
his snoustached spike & his many
spiral notebooks. Others come too.

We drink, we eat, wait some.
Then we hear your heavy step, your
sigh. "John! You cry. Say, guys!"

We get you your chair, a
beer, some food. You smile, twinkle,
tell of your day. We all relax. The
Musician is safely arrived.

-11-

Those hours, those days, those long
ago years, that place, those people,
all are scattered yet, ~~to~~ to join again.
And yet, and yet, I am in this
top room remembering that one,
I am writing this to you, my
beloved brother to read this as
well to people I have invited to
come here this Saturday to celebrate
the Jellie Literary Guild's 25th
anniversary. I am glad of them,
I love them, as I love you, as I
love those faces from all those
years. I love you all.

Jim, you taught me as much
about love for the world & its
creatures as any, more. Peace
love, love, you'd say, sober, high,
& deep in your cups. It's what
you lived, how you lived. I will
render you to host this weekend's
meeting in this good, happy spirit
as the gift you gave to me that
I seek to share with all.

 b-2500B



Edited By Raymond Souland Jr. @B

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

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NEW ENGLAND

2013

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Thanks especially this time to my beloved Kassi for soldiering through fatigue & illness, & the stresses of the season, to help me create this issue, & host the 25th anniversary Jellicle Literary Guild meeting. When life is finest, you are usually present.





Jack Kerouac: A Psychonaut in Denial

[Essay]

*The following is excerpted from the work-in-progress book
All These Serious Faces Will Only Drive You Mad.
Published by Reality Sandwich in November 2011
http://www.realitysandwich.com/kerouac_psychonaut.*

At the turn of the 1960s, Jack Kerouac found himself in a profound state of limbo, representing the climax of an existential crisis that predated his life as a published author. He had been looking for an “answer” to his problems since his early twenties,¹ yet for a variety of reasons his dilemma remained unresolved. Then a 35-year-old Jack became famous in an instant when *On the Road* was published in the fall of 1957, and this led to the total disruption of his already chaotic life. Suddenly his world became very claustrophobic, as he was pushed into the role of a counter-culture celebrity—despite the fact that very few were giving him credit as a legitimate author of American literature.

In his 1962 novel *Big Sur*, Kerouac reflects on the period: “. . . I’ve been driven mad for three years by endless telegrams, phone calls, requests, mail, visitors, reporters, snoopers . . .”² Kerouac wrote that book in October 1961 by fictionalizing events that had happened mainly in the summer of 1960—a trip from New York to California, visiting San Francisco, Bixby Canyon, and San Jose (where Neal Cassady was living). It was his first lengthy trip in three years, and *Big Sur* was the first book he completed since writing *The Dharma Bums* in November 1957. Kerouac’s plan was to pass the summer in solitude so that he could recover his mental balance while checking the publisher galleys for his *Book of Dreams*.³ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, whose budding City Lights imprint would be publishing the dream book that year, told Kerouac to stay at his cabin in Bixby Canyon, on the Pacific Coast south of Monterey (technically just north of Big Sur).

In the period surrounding both the events depicted in *Big Sur* and the writing and editing of the book, Jack actively experimented with certain psychedelic substances that hadn’t yet made a large impression on the American culture: mescaline, ayahuasca, and psilocybin mushrooms. At the start of *Big Sur*, he mentions some of these substances in a slightly negative manner, as if to suggest that they had worsened his overall mental condition: “. . . ‘One fast move or I’m gone,’ I realize, gone the way of the last three years of drunken hopelessness which is a physical and spiritual and metaphysical hopelessness you cant learn in school no matter how many books on existentialism or pessimism you read, or how many jugs of vision-producing Ayahuasca you drink, or Mescaline take, or Peyote goop up with—”⁴

However, this can’t be the whole story, since Kerouac’s letters offer an entirely different view on his psychonautic exploration during this time. Jack first tried mescaline in October

1959,⁵ and he was apparently most open about it with Allen Ginsberg, to whom he wrote the following on June 20, 1960: “When on mescaline I was so bloody high I saw that all our ideas about a ‘beatific’ new gang of worldpeople, and about instantaneous truth being the last truth. etc. etc. I saw them as all perfectly correct and prophesied, as never on drinking or sober I saw it—Like an Angel looking back on life sees that every moment fell right into place and each had flowery meaning . . .”⁶ This kind of clarity must have been cherished by a man who saw his life as a long chain of rambling misadventures.

Kerouac was even moved to create a 5,000-word “Mescaline Report” in order to document his hallucinations and revelations. He said he intended to take mescaline monthly, and he couldn’t wait to test out LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). In the same letter Kerouac mentioned his intention to flee New York, shortly before Ferlinghetti suggested that Jack use his cabin as an escape. The actual trip lasted about two months, from mid-July to mid-September 1960.

After returning from California, Kerouac had the opportunity to try ayahuasca on October 7, 1960.⁷ Ginsberg had just visited South America and brought back some of the liquid preparation, also known as “yagé” (pronounced “yah-hey,” but they usually misspelled it as “yage”). William S. Burroughs had done the same in the early 1950s, as documented in his fictionalized letters titled “In Search of Yage” (written in ‘53 but not published until ‘63). Kerouac seems to have tasted the real thing since, according to Ginsberg (writing during the event), Jack remarked, “This is one of the most sublime or tender or lovely moments of all our lives together . . .”⁸ That’s not to say the experience was only positive. In June 1963 Jack reflected to Allen that, when he would wander into Manhattan for drinking binges, “I come back [to Long Island] with visions of horror as bad as Ayahuasca vision on the neanderthal million years in caves, the gruesomeness of life!”⁹

A few months after Kerouac’s ayahuasca trip, in January 1961, he ingested capsules containing the extract of what he called “Sacred Mushrooms,”¹⁰ a nickname for psilocybin.¹¹ Ginsberg had recently visited Dr. Timothy Leary at Harvard to participate in Leary’s soon-to-be-controversial psychedelic studies. Ginsberg brought the capsules back to New York to distribute to various people, and Kerouac went to Allen’s Manhattan apartment to try them for himself.¹² Kerouac’s reaction to this experience is recorded in a letter he sent to Timothy Leary later that month (known as the “Dear Coach” letter). Jack wrote, “Mainly I felt like a floating [Genghis] Kahn on a magic carpet with my interesting lieutenants and gods. . . some ancient feeling about old geheuls [sic] in the grass, and temples, exactly also like the sensation I got drunk on pulque¹³ floating in the Xochimilco gardens on barges laden with flowers and singers. . . some old Golden Age dream of man, very nice.”¹⁴

Kerouac’s final experiment of this period came in December 1961 (as least according to the published literature). It’s fairly evident that on this occasion Kerouac ingested actual dried psilocybin mushrooms instead of capsules.¹⁵ During the writing of *Big Sur*, some of these psychedelic experiences crept into the book despite Kerouac’s initial statement about “metaphysical hopelessness.” Upon awaking from a bizarre dream sequence, “Jack Duluo” (Kerouac’s fictional projection of himself) reflects on the “millionpieced mental explosions that I remember I thought were so wonderful when I’d first seen them on Peotl and Mescaline. . . broken in pieces some of them big orchestral and then rainbow explosions of sound and sight mixed.”¹⁶ The “peotl” (or “peyotl,” the indigenous spellings of “peyote”) cactus has long been consumed by tribes in northern Mexico and the American southwest for the psychoactive

mescaline it contains.¹⁷

Kerouac first encountered peyote eight years before his trip to Bixby Canyon, while living with Burroughs in Mexico City in 1952. The two embarked on a fruitful series of peyote trials that Kerouac described in his letters to friends back in the United States. On March 12 of that year, Jack wrote to John Clellon Holmes about what was possibly his first full-on psychedelic experience, conveying “the wild visions of musical pure truth I got on peotl (talk about your Technicolor visions!) . . . ”¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, on June 5, Kerouac wrote again to Holmes, telling of the time when a few “young American hipsters” gave him and Burroughs some peyote, after which the duo walked around Mexico City at night. In a park Jack found himself “wanting to sit in the grass and stay near the ground all night by moonlight, with the lights of the show and the houses all flashing, flashing in my eyeballs . . . ”¹⁹

This letter is important for another reason: in it Jack explains the thrill of writing with his new “sketching” style, an early conception of what he would later call “spontaneous prose.” Late in October 1951, Kerouac’s friend Ed White had suggested that Jack try to write as though he was painting a scene.²⁰ Kerouac told Holmes he was “beginning to discover . . . something beyond the novel and beyond the arbitrary confines of the story . . . into the realms of revealed Picture . . . revealed whatever . . . revealed prose . . . wild form, man, wild form. Wild form’s the only form holds what I have to say—my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory in—I have now an irrational lust to set down everything I know—in narrowing circles . . . ”²¹

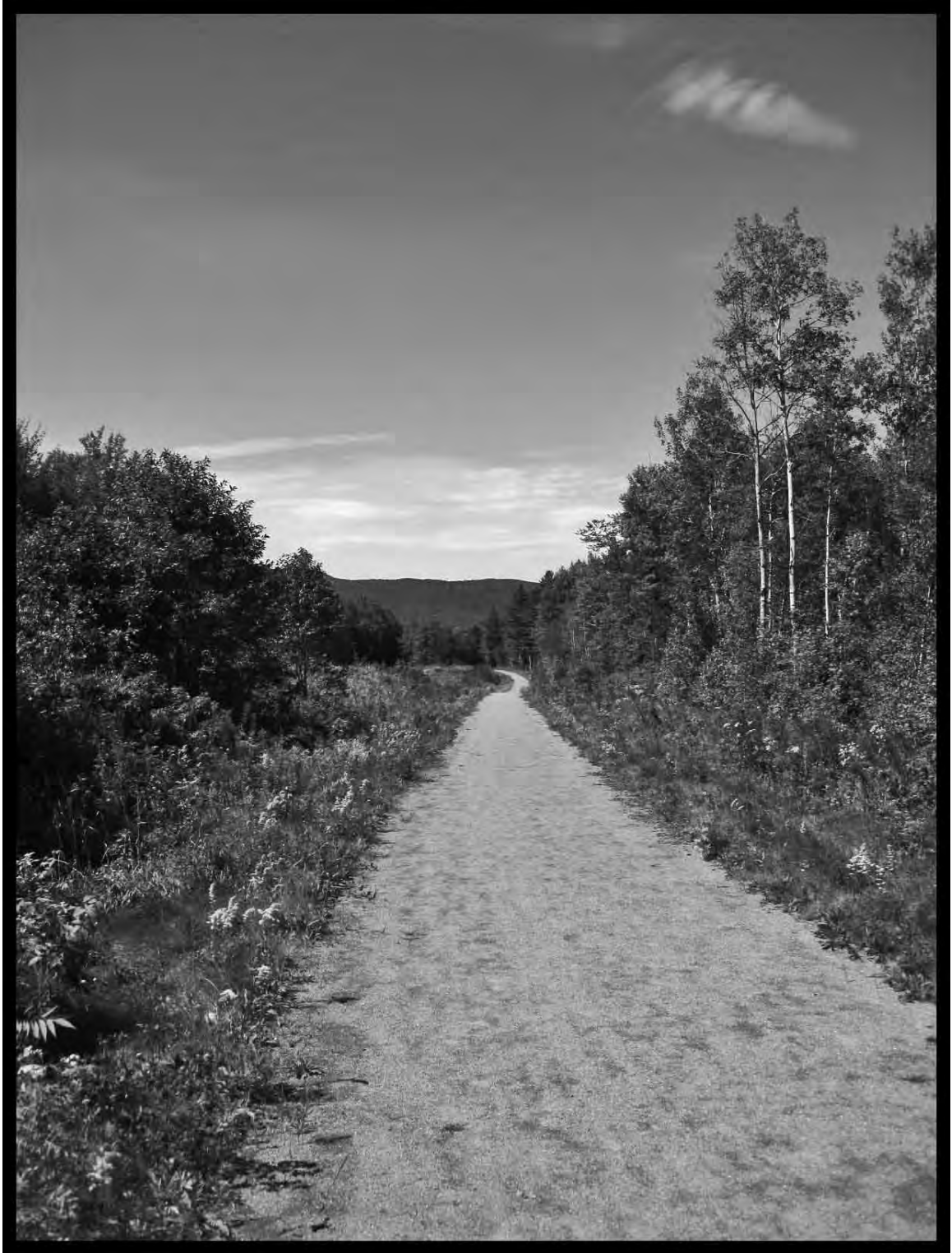
The strong parallel between the “rainbow explosions” Kerouac saw on mescaline and peyote, and the feeling that he was “exploding” to describe his thoughts about reality, suggests that Jack’s psychedelic exploration in 1952 had a decisive influence on what would become his trademark prose style.

Big Sur generally depicts Kerouac’s brush with “insanity” as stemming from his alcoholism. There’s hardly a time in the book when “Duluoz” is not holding a bottle of whiskey or wine. But as the story progresses, some of the descriptions seem to fall way outside the scope of what alcohol can do to a person’s mind and one’s perception of reality. For instance, when Jack’s friends try to get him to eat some food, he’s too distracted by his mental aberrations: “Masks explode before my eyes when I close them, when I look at the moon it waves, moves, when I look at my hands and feet they creep—Everything is moving, the porch is moving like ooze and mud, the chair trembles under me.”²² Notice again the mention of “explosions.”

Or examine the aforementioned dream sequence, in which Jack sees numerous “Vulture People” copulating in a trash dump: “Their faces are leprous thick with soft yeast but painted with makeup . . . yellow pizza puke faces, disgusting us . . . we’ll be taken to the Underground Slimes to walk neck deep in steaming mucks pulling huge groaning wheels (among small forked snakes) so the devil with the long ears can mine his Purple Magenta Square Stone that is the secret of all this Kingdom—”²³

Even a glance at Kerouac’s *Book of Dreams* makes it obvious that he frequently had extraordinary night-visions. But such passages really bring to mind a few specific things: the psychedelic experience, existentialist literature, and the rare cases in which the two are combined. Though Kerouac more often talked of his fondness for Dostoevsky than for later existentialists, Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1938 novel *Nausea* (not published in English until 1949²⁴) is an indubitable precursor to *Big Sur*.

Nausea contains a first-person journal-style account by a French man named Roquen-



tin, who unexpectedly becomes overtaken by mortal horror and bodily uneasiness. As Roquentin says early in the novel: “Then the Nausea seized me, I dropped to a seat, I no longer knew where I was; I saw the colours spin slowly around me, I wanted to vomit. And since that time, the Nausea has not left me, it holds me.”²⁵

There’s a deeper connection between the two novels as well. In his 2002 book *Breaking Open the Head*, Daniel Pinchbeck reports that Sartre tried mescaline in 1935 as a research subject in Paris. Pinchbeck writes that “long after the physical effect of the drug had worn off, Sartre found himself plunged into a lingering nightmare of psychotic dread and paranoia; shoes threatened to turn into insects, stone walls seethed with monsters.”²⁶ Pinchbeck infers that this influenced the writing of *Nausea*—but he thought Sartre’s affliction lasted about a week. Actually Sartre experienced hallucinations of shellfish (usually lobsters, but he also called them crabs) for years, according to a 2009 book of conversations between Jean-Paul and John Gerassi, whose parents were close friends with Sartre. Gerassi quotes Sartre saying: “Yeah, after I took mescaline I started seeing crabs around me all the time. They followed me in the streets, into class. . . I would wake up in the morning and say, ‘Good morning, my little ones, how did you sleep?’”²⁷

In 1954, thanks to Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*, the Western world became much more aware of the potential promise of mescaline as a visionary aid. But interspersed with descriptions of his wondrous hallucinations, Huxley cautioned not to place too much expectation on mescaline for spiritual enlightenment.²⁸ Still, the book was extremely influential in the literary world, and it paved the way for the psychedelic uprising that Leary and others would lead in the 1960s.

So it’s a bit surprising that someone in Kerouac’s position, writing a book like *Big Sur* in 1961, wouldn’t emphasize psychedelics more or even try to work them into the plot, if only through a flashback or some similar device. Not only did he largely leave them out of the book, but he actually downplayed the way they had guided his own “mysticism”—something that, in retrospect, is clearly evident in books from his “Duluo Legend” (as he called his oeuvre of semiautobiographical fiction) such as *On the Road* (published in 1957), *The Dharma Bums* (1958), and *Visions of Gerard* (1963). Kerouac even amended the line about “the mad ones” early in *Road* that would become his most famous quote, and—perhaps not unexpectedly—the final wording seems influenced by his 1952 peyote experiments. In the 1951 “scroll” version (not published until 2007) it read “burn, burn, burn like roman candles across the night.”²⁹ But in the 1957 version, the line went “burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop . . .”³⁰

It all seems even more suspicious after learning that mescaline actually renewed Jack’s faith in his unique prose style in 1959, just as peyote seems to have inspired the style initially in 1952. Soon after taking mescaline, Kerouac told Ginsberg that during the trip he’d had “the sensational revelation that I’ve been on the right track with spontaneous never-touch-up poetry of immediate report . . .”³¹ Kerouac’s “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” held that writing should be “confessional,” “always honest,” and—the part most tied up with myths about Kerouac—have “no revisions.”³² We’ve already seen one case where Kerouac revised a work that he claimed to be an entirely spontaneous composition. So one can’t help but wonder: was Kerouac being as honest as he claimed in his prose theory?

Other information in the “Dear Coach” letter helps to answer the question of why Ker-

ouac would downplay psychedelics in his fiction and public statements. As he told Leary, “It was a definite Satori. Full of psychic clairvoyance (but you must remember that this is not half as good as the peaceful ecstasy [sic] of simple Samadhi trance as I described that in *Dharma Bums*).”³³

Kerouac intended for *The Dharma Bums* to be read as a resolution to the existential conflict so visible in earlier books like *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*. He also hoped for it to be a life manual for anyone in a similar situation, because in the mid- to late-1950s he viewed Buddhism as “the answer.” In other words, Kerouac perceived the potential rise of psychedelic drugs in the 1960s as a threat to the usefulness of his own body of work. In turn, his disparagement of psychedelics—and his silence (outside of private letters) about their potential advantages—was propaganda for the Duluoz Legend.

In fact, Kerouac found little use for Buddhism in his personal life by the start of the *Big Sur* period. His devout Catholic family had been fighting him about it for years. And as he told Carolyn Cassady after writing *Big Sur*—specifically referring to the end of the book, which describes his mental breakdown—“I realized all my Buddhism had been words—comforting words, indeed.”³⁴ Despite that, he still made *Desolation Angels* a sort of sequel to *Dharma Bums* a few years later, keeping much of the Buddhist terminology in place. This differs substantially from the idea espoused by many of Kerouac’s biographers, who took a line of recorded conversation in the “Dear Coach” letter (“walking on water wasn’t built in a day”) as a sign that Jack saw very limited value in psychedelics. As it turns out, Kerouac’s literary treatment of psychedelics is one of many routes to a rude awakening about the Duluoz Legend, showing that it’s far less “objectively” true than commonly thought. In *Big Sur*, Kerouac wanted the cause of his mental breakdown to be alcoholism fueled by fame and “mortal existence,” not a spiritual awakening (or re-awakening) inspired by psychedelics.

We can deduce this by looking at Kerouac’s October 1961 letter to Ferlinghetti, whom Jack actually visited again in San Francisco before returning to the East Coast in September 1960. As Kerouac writes: “. . . I was going to have lots more at the ‘end’ when I come to your house 706 but suddenly saw the novel should end at the cabin . . .”³⁵ So *Big Sur* ends the way it does because of a literary decision that Kerouac made, not necessarily because it depicts the way the events “objectively” happened.

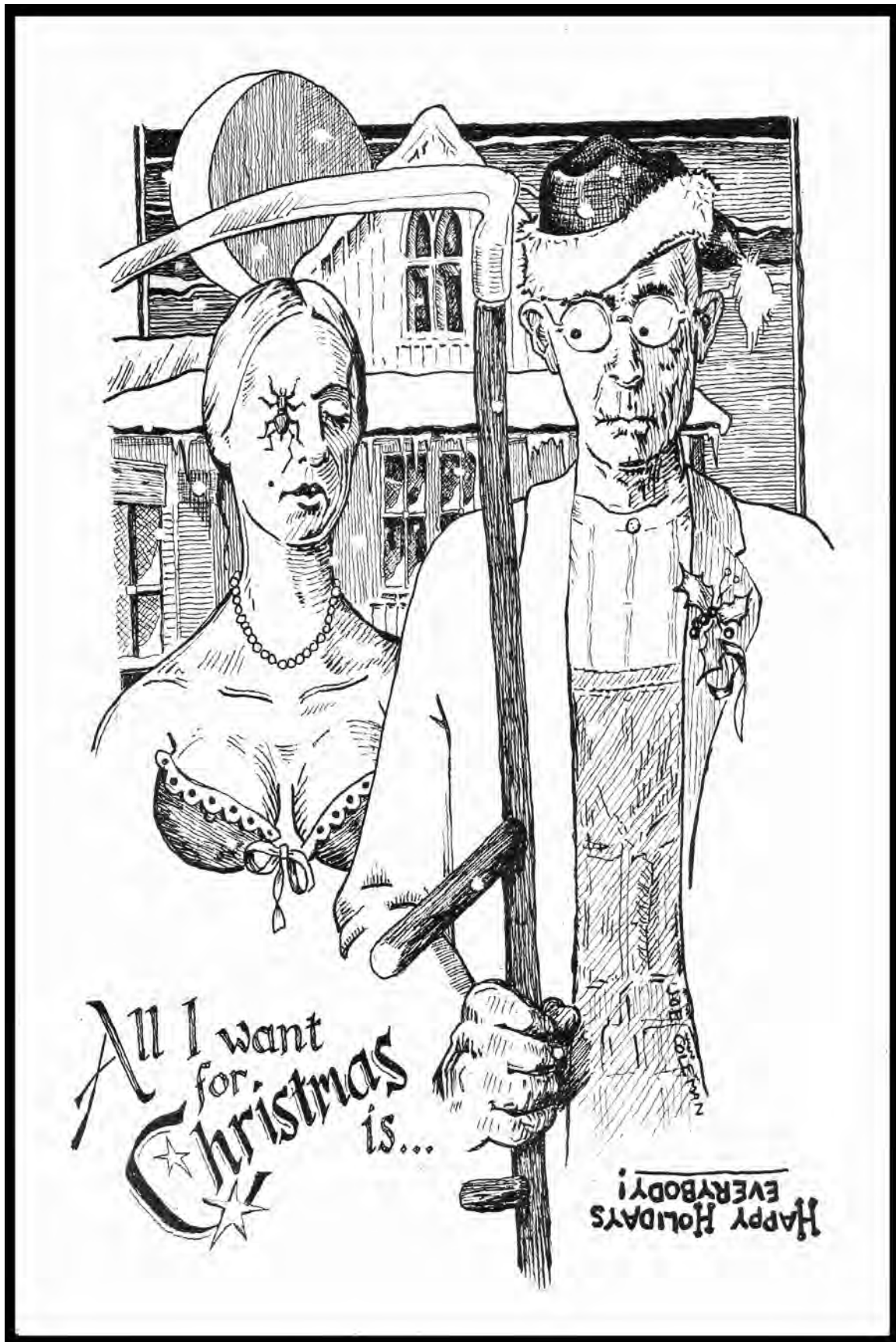
Kerouac wasn’t only deceiving his readership; he was deceiving himself. His unwillingness—or his inability—to revise his view of reality and existence according to his own subjective life experience led to his early death in 1969. Just as a butterfly transforms from a caterpillar, he could have emerged from his chrysalis a twice-born being. The story behind *Big Sur* shows that Kerouac had the opportunity to progress through his existential crisis and live an entirely new life of liberation and prosperity. His loss need not be our own.

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5. Kerouac, J. *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*. pp. 252-253.
6. Kerouac, J. *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*. p. 292.

7. Maher Jr., Paul. *Kerouac: His Life and Work*. 2004. Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2007. p. 414.
8. Maher Jr., P. Ibid. p. 415. Ellipsis was in original.
9. Kerouac, J. *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*. p. 419.
10. In both the second volume of *Selected Letters* and *Kerouac: A Biography*, Charters writes erroneously that Kerouac took LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) in January 1961. In the biography she also mistakenly states that Kerouac went to Cambridge, Mass., to see Leary.
11. "Psilocybin Mushrooms." Erowid. Accessed on 6/4/2011. <http://www.erowid.org/plants/mushrooms/mushrooms.shtml>
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21. Kerouac, J. *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*. p. 371. Long ellipses were in book; short ellipsis is mine.
22. Kerouac, J. *Big Sur*. p. 200.
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* * * * *



Joe Coleman

Joe Coleman



My Christmas Wish

All I want for Christmas is Chlamydia
 All I want for Christmas is V.D.
 —some sort of bad infection I can get without protection
 —a hot sensation every time I pee . . .

Let me find contagion Christmas morning
 oozing after sex the prior night
 It's not quite a celebration minus fiery inflammation.
 A bit of seepage makes this season bright.

All I want is crabs . . . an infestation
 of crawlies I can contract easily
 I just wanna catch the clap or some other gross-out crap
 from Mildred having Yuletide sex with me.

All I want for Christmas is *Soretoolia*.
 All I want is one wild Christmas fling
 that gives me gonorrhea like a raging souvenir.
 I *hate* to wear that little rubber thing!

My Christmas wish is something that's bacterial,
 flaky, scaly patches I can see
 when pulling on my britches. Something vile that always itches.
 What a perfect gift an S.T.D. would be!

All I want is stage-three *Peckeriasis*
 to shrink my winky down to half its size—
 something I can have that will not be cured with salve—
 and greenish discharge caking on my thighs.

All I want is Syphilis for Christmas.
 No sweater vests, or ties, or fancy watch . . .
 Syph's the gift that keeps on giving for as long as we are living.
 I'd like a Christmas present for my crotch.

My Christmas prayer is for a stubborn red rash
 and more related symptoms to appear.
 I already have arthritis . . . now I hope to get *Twatitis*
 when Mildred spreads her Merry Christmas cheer.

All I want is holiday *Ballemia*:
 the creeping crud that Millie-sex transmits
 —shooting pains, like darts, piercing thru' my private parts
 and bulbous masses on my naughty bits.

All I want for Christmas is *Dickpusstia*
 —something real disgusting down below.
 In our Noël Bacchanalia I would like my genitalia
 covered in her fungus white as snow.

All I want is viral *Nutsackosis*
 —microscopic agents peeling skin.
 A nice irritated member on the last day of December
 and Mildred to ring twenty fourteen in!

I hope you have a truly joyous Christmas!
 —I mean this from the bottom of my heart.
 If you start to feel erotic, buy some cheap anti-biotic.
 Avoiding Mildred also would be smart.

* * *

**This Jade Museum
(a Guided Tour . . .)**

We welcome you to the Institute of Modern Lies and Denials:
 our collection of “friendly acquaintances” with warmly deceptive smiles;
 an exhibition of artistry foisted on gullible hearts
 where phonies get frames and duplicities hang for all lovers of the Arts.
 There are two-faced canvasses, varnished untruths,
 excuses and alibis
 painted by hands with fingers crossed to captivate ignorant eyes . . .
 In our Hall of Cruel Disappointments and our Gallery of Deceit
 the fork-tongued brushwork makes the bitterness taste like something sweet.
 We hope you enjoy these fallacies . . .
 We hope you’ll appreciate fraud . . .
 Kindly be quiet during the tour.
 Please do not laugh or applaud . . .

We begin with these cordial imposters:
 See how their false teeth gleam?
 Both of them are pretending. Neither is who they seem.
 Perhaps they are meeting and saying “hello,” or promising to keep in touch.
 Do they say “goodbye?” It doesn’t matter . . .
 Words don’t amount to much.

This next face appears to be tender
 but is really, in fact, insincere . . .
This one is pouring fabrications into that other one's ear . . .
This shows a public persona . . .
This is a hidden desire . . .
This one is bogus . . . *That* one's a fake . . .
This is a master liar . . .
This shows a stooge taking hook, line, and sinker . . .
This is a flim-flammer selling some soap . . .
This is a con-artist running a scam on a poor unsuspecting dope . . .
This is a fool who was strung along
 and the someone who cut the rope . . .
This is a broken promise (of course . . .)
This is a shattered hope . . .
This is a childlike, easy mark . . . *This* is an innocent youth . . .
This shows a shameless manipulator bending the flexible truth . . .
This is something that started in summer when one of them was naïve;
 a person born yesterday, (easily taken, eager to believe . . .)
This is an elegant fairy tale spun by a most-accomplished thief . . .
This is an aftermath—
 the end of trust—
 the beginning of disbelief.
These are vows and oaths, etcetera, agreements, arrangements, and such . . .
These are all fictions. They are not true. **Nobody keeps in touch.**
This is somebody far, far apart—afraid to approach any nearer . . .
This is a picture of disillusionment . . .
 Finally, *this* is a mirror.

* * *

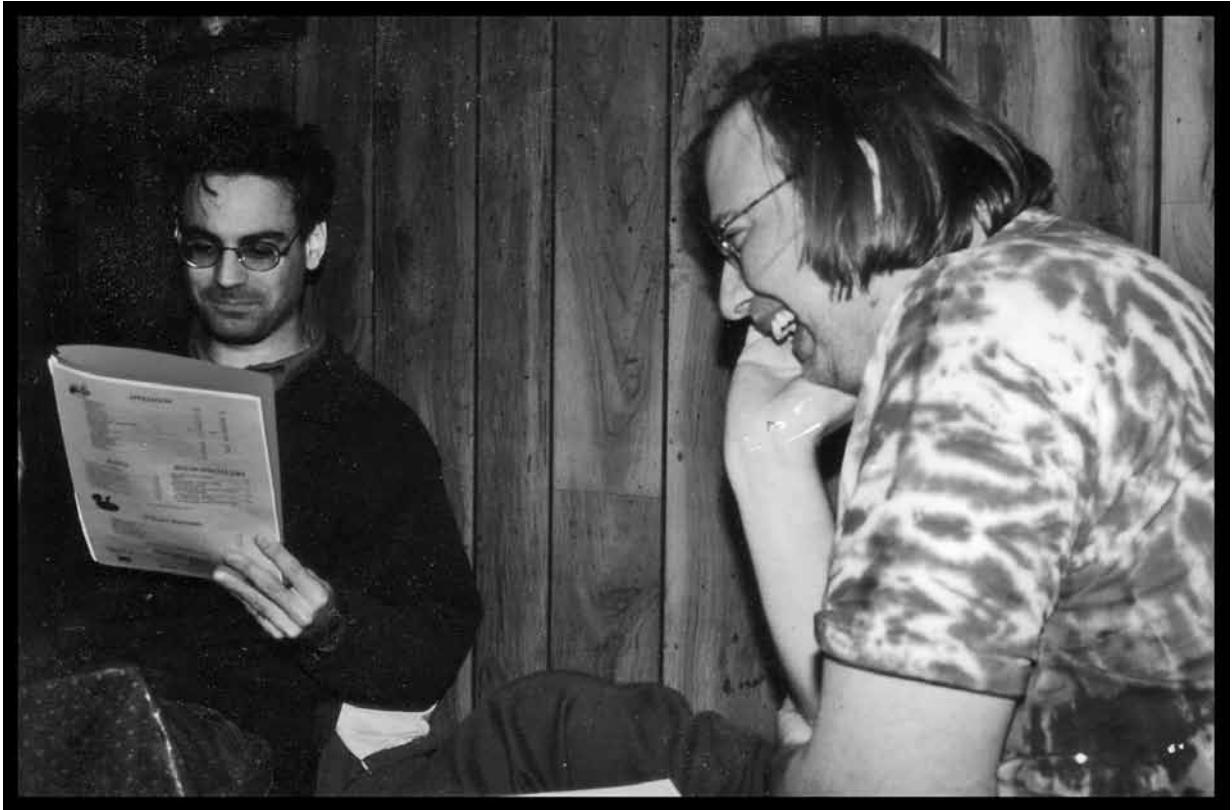
The Arc-Welder

Flips face-mask up and down
to shield his eyes from white-hot light
to hide white-hot eyes
fueled by an acetelyne source.
He is valve with broken gauge,
tank,
hose,
tool and tip
sparking in an arc.
He does not bind.
He does not seal.
He cannot make them one.
He does not weld.
It all grows cold.

A welding torch is useless on flesh . . .
we burn,
hope smokes.
We do not join.

Shake hands.
Stay two arm-lengths apart . . .
Do not hold.

* * * * *



Ralph Emerson, Raymond Souland, Jr.
New Britain, Connecticut - 1990s



Ric Amante, Raymond Souland, Jr., Mark Shorette, Jim Burke III
New Britain, Connecticut - 2000

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

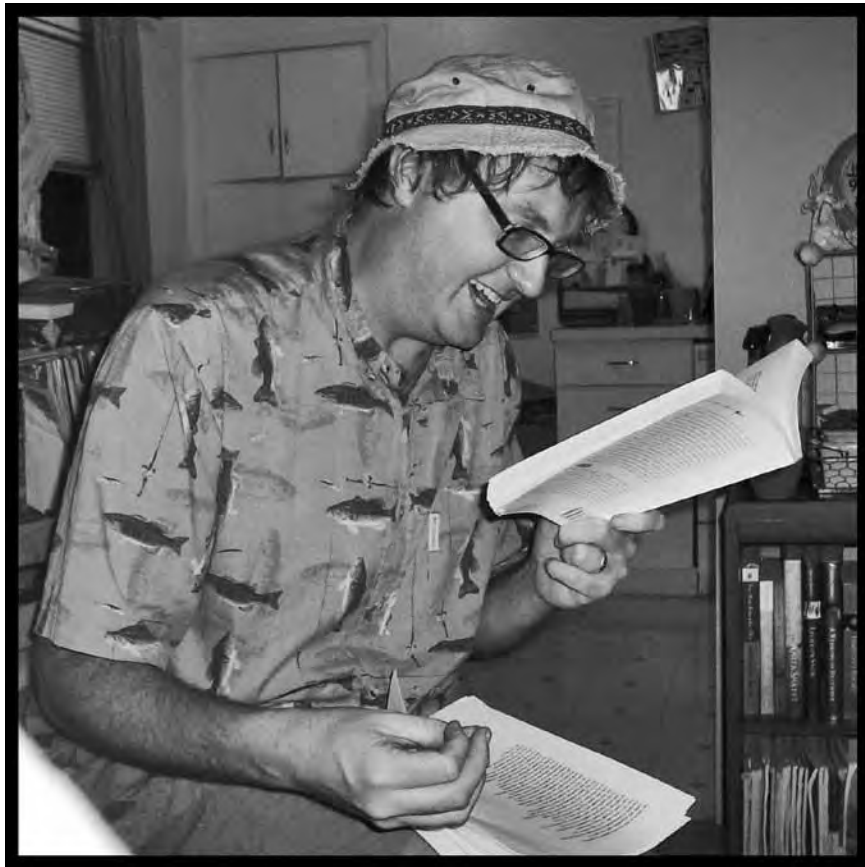
*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Jellicle Literary Guild 25th Anniversary 1988-2013

*“Nothing lasts . . . but nothing is lost . . .”
—Shpongole, 2005.*

1. The Jellicle Literary Guild first met on December 29, 1988 at Roma Restaurant in New Britain, Connecticut. It came to be for two reasons. The first because I'd collected a group of writers, musicians, & artist friends from the local university we all went to. We met on a Thursday, over a dozen of us, & my journals note it was a good time for the several hours it lasted.
2. On December 29, 1991, I hosted the 3rd anniversary meeting at Roma's, #28, which I thought was the last meeting of our group. I was moving to Boston in '92. Over a dozen people came again; I wrote in my journals that it being the final meeting many people were inspired to come.
3. On December 29, 1992, now living & going to graduate school in Boston, I decided to revive the Jellicle Guild. I missed it, & about ten people came out to Boston.
4. On December 29, 2001, after 13 years & 104 meetings, the Jellicle Literary Guild ended again. Roma Restaurant had new owners; the brown-paneled dining room we'd met in was demolished in favor of a coming sports bar emporium. Half a dozen people came to this meeting. Three of us that had been at meeting #1 were also at meeting #104.
5. On March 29, 2008, over 6 years & 3000 miles away from meeting #104, meeting #105 occurred in Portland, Oregon. I was married & Kassi was now co-hosting meetings. We held 9 meetings out there. One other East Coast member, Jim Burke III, came to a West Coast meeting, on June 28, 2008, via telephone.
6. On October 30, 2010, returned to the Boston area, we hosted meeting #114 in Arlington,



Michael Van Kleeck
Portland, Oregon - 2008



Victor Vanek
Portland, Oregon - 2008

Mass. There were 11 attendees—6 in person, 5 by video or proxy. We moved in 2013 to Melrose, Mass., & have held four meetings so far, including this 25th anniversary meeting, #126.

7. The second reason the Jellicle Literary Guild came to be is because of a book I'd read around '88 called *The Inklings* by Humphrey Carpenter. Carpenter's biography details a literary group called The Inklings (1933-1949)—comprising J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, & a few others—who were professors clustered at Oxford University in the UK around the Second World War. They met on Thursday nights in Lewis's shabby rooms, & read to each other works-in-progress (including Tolkien's *Hobbit* & *Lord of the Rings*).
8. The connection between The Inklings & the Jellicle Guild is that each emerged from a group of friends who'd met at a university, came to each other via books, & discovered friends to bond with for the long haul. There's something dear & intimate about finding a group of people to share Art with in this way, turn away from the world's noise & concerns & toward a group of intelligent, sympathetic faces.
9. My friend Jim Gregory, who later became a Catholic priest, named the Jellicle Literary Guild after T.S. Eliot's poem "The Song of the Jellicles," from his 1939 book *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (later adapted in 1981 by Andrew Lloyd Webber as the musical *Cats*). Gregory noted that Jellicle cats have conflicting characteristics (not too big, yet roly-poly), & said our group was similarly heterogeneous. Jellicle Cats also like to come out at night to dance at the Jellicle Ball "under the Jellicle Moon."
10. Roma Restaurant, as it sounds, was an Italian restaurant. Pasta, pizza, subs. In the early '90s, not long after we started coming there for our meetings—monthly from March to June & September to December—Roma was bought by two Polish men, Alex & Lech. They didn't change the barroom much, or the back dining room, but they did add Polish items to the menu. Pierogis & such. Until '99 or so, the joint was pretty stable. Once in awhile our tables, or the whole back dining room, were taken. Once, December 28, 1996, most strangely, the whole back room was filled with Polish dancers & music all night.
11. So much booze. Yes, there was good food—but the booze flowed from beginning to end. Pitcher after pitcher. Shot after shot. Often poor, we'd sneak in pints of whiskey & cases of beer ("brown bag policy"). Sometimes this boozing would raise the joys higher; sometimes the frustrations of drunk working class artists would blow up, yelling, crashing chairs, near brawls. But it was a bar & we took up a lot of dining room area for hours. I doubt without the flow of cash we'd been let to stay so long.
12. The revived meetings have been far less boozy. More ganja, more esoteric. Cosmic juice. More people just sober. The Art the focus. Which is fine by me. Even with the old meetings, by the summer of 2001 I was no longer drinking, moved on to better allies. I don't miss it, the booze. I wonder if some of the bad nights, broken friendships, bitterness that grew up over the years, could have been avoided, some or all. That said, any promising night can go wrong, or any poorly attended meeting can go right.
13. Once settled in Boston, I began hosting meetings occasionally up here. In May & November 1997, we met at an old German restaurant called Jacob Wirth's in Boston's Theatre District. Opened in 1868 in a Greek Revival building that had been built in 1844, high ceilings, good food, a piano player on Friday nights, it was nonetheless a down-home friendly place. My friend the poet Ric Amante had first brought me there, & our group was treated fine.



Jim Burke III
Arlington, Massachusetts - 2010



Raymond Soulard, Jr., Judih Haggai, Jim Burke III
Arlington, Massachusetts - 2011

- Late evening stumbled out to the Common to smoke ganja & celebrate Art & friendship.
14. A favorite habit of mine is to bring new friends to the meetings to meet my longtime friends. I brought friends I met at graduate school at Northeastern University (Michael McLoughlin), & later Emerson College (Joe Ciccone). Amante & I met at Harvard Bookstore where we worked together in '93-'94. We'd sip from his wine skin on the Greyhound bus down to Hartford. McLoughlin went on for his PhD in South Carolina, & he introduced me to his fellow PhD candidate & artist friend Barbara Brannon. She helped me develop *The Cenacle* from a zine-ish journal to one that used good desktop publishing tools like QuarkXpress & Photoshop. Yoshi Aoki was my housemate in Cambridge for two years. Japanese but grew up in Korea. Loved *Beavis & Butt-head* & Boston sports. Crazy laugh. Once we brought to a meeting a book of Japanese poetry which he read aloud to the group in Japanese, & I then read the English translation.
 15. *Many Pleasures over the Years #1: Poetry Flings*. We'd sit close circled & read one poem after the next in turn. Next, next, next. Sometimes Jim Burke III would play a song, being a musician. Round after round. No applause, no let up. I don't know of anyone else who does this. There hasn't been a Fling at the revived meetings yet.
 16. At the April 1, 1995 meeting, I announced the intended creation of a literary periodical called *The Cenacle*. Since the only artistic people I knew were the people at the meetings, they would for years comprise both the contributors & the readership. At first I tried to match 8 meetings a year with 8 issues a year. Couldn't keep up with it. As of 2008, it's a quarterly journal; as of 2010, the meetings are quarterly too. They occur together & this frequency works well.
 17. The March 23, 1996 meeting was the "wake" for our friend Mark Bergeron leaving the group. It wasn't pretty. People did come & go over the years, sometimes quietly, sometimes explosively. It seemed to depend in importance on how long they'd come & how much they'd contributed. Many came once or twice; a core came for years. What's important here is that, like a rock group, the name can stay the same but the players determine the song. Why do some keep coming, some don't? That's a mystery I've never solved.
 18. So many nights before meetings from '95 to 2000 I'd be up till the weaker hours working on *The Cenacle*, typing, proofreading, cutting, pasting. The morning of meetings doing finishing work at Kinko's, binding copies. Dubbing JG highlights cassettes before leaving home, hand labeling each one while on the bus to Hartford. Mostly this went fine but sometimes I'd fuck it up. Miss the bus, arrive late, forget something. I wanted so much to do right by the project & its people. I was 24 when it started & double that now. I have the same driving will & wish to do right by it all.
 19. Mostly a group of young men, in their early 20s when it began in 1988. Some of us brought girlfriends & wives from time to time. Occasionally an unattached female came as someone's non-involved guest. Each & every time, one guy or more would make a play. Sometimes this led to other-room sex; more often to anger & frustration at rejection. Worse when two guys aimed at the same girl. It was part of the volatile nature of the project, like the epic flowing booze, & kept things unpredictable in good & bad ways.
 20. *Many Pleasures over the Years #2: Manifest Project*. In the spring of 2008, I got this idea to inspire more creative contributions. Give half a dozen people each a disposable camera & a piece of chalk, along with a stamped envelope with our address on it. Instructions: *go out & manifest yourself*. Take pictures, use the chalk, see what you come up with. In 2008, 2010,



Ric Amante, Joe Coleman, Victor Vanek, Raymond Soulard, Jr., Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor
Melrose, Massachusetts - 2013



Jeremy Kilar
Melrose, Massachusetts - 2013

& this year, I tried this experiment, handing out cams, envelopes, & chalk at JG meetings, requesting them back within a month or so. Some of the pictures would be published in the next *Cenacle*. It's been a great success &, like the poetry fling, makes me want to do it again & also come up with new challenges.

21. Very early on, some of the 1989 meetings were held at the university campus in New Britain in a campus ministry school bus. The bus was purchased when Grand Central's Station, the coffeehouse cum hangout cum meeting place cum ganja & music den, burned down, part of a whole block of buildings near the university. Some said arson. I didn't know what the Jellicle Guild was early on, & I still lived in New Britain, so more casual gatherings with friends happened a lot. They're so long ago now.
22. It was Jim Gregory who first recorded a JG meeting on cassette, the 18th meeting, July 27, 1990. But that inspired me &, with rare exception, I'd bring or arrange to be brought a cassette recorder or boombox of some kind for every meeting. I wish more pictures had been taken back then. In recent years, there are digital recordings, pictures, even some videos shot.
23. *Many Pleasures over the Years #3: The Proxy Concept & Video Readings*. Not everyone is local to the meetings. Back when, this decided who participated & who didn't. Now it does not. I invite people far to send me a piece to read, pictures, etc. And I do share it, or ask someone at the meeting to. Thus, by proxy. Another approach is to film one's presentation, record it on computer, by phone. This idea began in 2010 with my friend Judih Haggai in Israel. She sends a video of her poetry, her puppets, her kibbutz, every meeting. Martina Newberry does too, from California. These are technological innovations but even in the early days, from 1990 on, there was a tape recorder. Sometimes such ideas work & thus are justified.
24. My friend Jim Burke III was divorced around 1990. He spent years in a bitter custody battle for his two daughters. He won eventually, but those years were cruel to his soul. He played guitar like a genius-madman at meetings, but also drank like a lunatic at times. Some nights was to dull the deep ache of missing his kids. How many meeting nights did we blind drunk drive home from Roma's? Too many. Me, drunk also, but sobering by my fear, yelling at him to *drive straight! slow down!* Led Zeppelin blasting on the radio. Each time a wild danger & yet we survived, nobody got hurt. Would I for any reason go back & do that again? No. But at the time there seemed no choice. I loved him as my brother. I thought, in my drunken madness, *who better could I die with tonight? I don't want to, but who better?*
25. September 26, 1998 journal entry: "The spirit of the JG remains even as the body disintegrates. It can't go on much longer . . . nothing can replace it. I wonder if anything comparable can succeed it."
26. In October 1999 we had our meeting at Curious Liquids Cafe in Boston. Located across from the State Capitol building on Beacon Hill, Curious Liquids had a fairly big main floor, & a staircase descent to two separate rooms, smaller & bigger. The bigger one vast with old chairs & couches, windows looking to the pedestrian level of Park Street. Alcoves with armchairs in them where I'd hide from many days at the end of long tiring shifts at work. I knew a homeless Native American kid there named Sunrise, from Minnesota. A really good artist, sweet soul. Our group found some space & had a good time. The place later became a bank, a TV studio, whatever. I am so glad we went there, & that I have

recordings of us doing our thing.

27. *Many Pleasures over the Years #4: New Issues*. Kassi & I bring copies of *The Cenacle* to each meeting, usually finished in the day or two before the meeting. The two weekends prior, we pick places in Boston to do the copy-editing & lay out. My choice is always the Marriott Hotel lounge in Copley Place, Back Bay. Lived down the street from there in my earliest Boston days, '92-'94. Pretty, stylish, expensive, but nobody troubles us on the couch we sit to do our work. Always an event around: Bruins in the playoffs, Boston Marathon. When we hand out the new issue at the meeting, I am proud, happy. It will help guide the meeting & many present will read from its pages.
28. Gerry Dillon came to many meetings back when. Smart, funny, a combustible artist/intellect in a diminutive frame. I'd known him years & years before the JG. We drank deep many nights, loved books & music & TV shows & watching girls' asses together. He's a hell of a fiction writer, his Irish blood runs true in story telling. Science fiction grounded in history, myth, poetry. I still hope one day to publish a book of his stories.
29. Jim Burke III played his guitar & sang with the power & delicacy of all the cosmos. He taught me about what full unnegotiable commitment to Art is. He'd play & I'd read. Perfect moments. When I finally tried LSD in April 1997, & told him after, he nodded & smiled & said, "once you go through that door, you don't come back." I cherish that verity.
30. Mark Shorette is a switch hitter in writing like few I've known. His fiction is often great; his poetry often even better. His laugh is large as his frame. His search for the spiritually good things in the world ceaseless. As much as all that, he's a good friend. I would back when tangle into the worst romances, & he would keep me paddling no matter what. How many Tarot card readings did we do? How many I Ching coins? How many Rune stones?
31. Mark Bergeron remains a brother to me no matter the years & silence between us. We wrote among each other's notebooks like found twin brothers. We roamed streets, diners, bars, read to each other freshly writ works. I know time is both real & yet not the final word by how long I've not seen him & by how fresh & new remains his chamber in my heart.
32. There are others, no doubt, names I will reel off to include them. Chester Lau. Jack Heitner. Ron Byczkiewicz. Bob Billings. Ralph Emerson. John Barton. Allen Line. Nemo Boko. Michael Van Kleeck. Jeremy Kilar. Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor. Tom Sheehan. Joe Coleman. Others upon others. I thank you all for coming & pray your safety tonight, whatever we were or are to each other, then, now, hereon.
33. Ah, Kelly Angileri. I met you the day of the October 28, 1989 meeting, you came along with us that night. We dated good for several months & bad for a couple of years. You introduced me to the Latin American poets, & poetry in translation in general. You were one fine-looking woman but you were broken inside by a bitter mother & your immature understanding of love. Me? I was worse. Yet for a little while, a few meetings, you were my joy to bring. You were lonely in a strange college town, working as a teacher for a year. I was lonely, period. You humbled me to my own ignorance of romance & relationships. I've arrived to marriage these many years later, to a woman I'd take over you every time, but I will confess that you taught me, first with sweetness, later cruelty, things that help me to be a better man when I am.
34. One goal of mine is to eventually have all the recorded meetings back to 1990 digitized & online at ScriptorPress.com. It's a partway realized goal; a year or two away from done, I'd

guess. I'm proud of this project & still feel it's rare of its kind since the days of literary clubs at Tolkien's & Lewis's wartime Oxford.

35. I read my old journals to write this piece, & re-read some of Carpenter's *Inklings*. I fought anew through years-ago highs & lows, good & bad meetings & what lives surrounded those meetings. It left me melancholy for gone faces & days, even as I cherish now, cherish the life I live, the Art I do, the *Cenacle* this piece will be in, the Jellicle Guild it will debut at. "*Nothing lasts . . . but nothing is lost . . .*"
36. Kassi said as I struggled at times to write this: tell why you started it; what it means to you; why you still do it. Simple: *I had to; it means everything; I have to*. It connects the ongoing now to the many many thens, their whos & whats. It helps me recognize myself still as the years pass. It challenges me newly each time to come up with the goods. To keep playing. Keep breathing. Love new & old, & again & again. Write & write & write & write.

Thank you for reading or listening to this.

DAZ. 12-26-2013





**"John Singer Sargent Watercolors" Exhibition,
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts**

Martina Newberry

My Mother's Eldest Sister

My Aunt Lottie, in Lorain Ohio, risked her life to run outside and save her duck from a tornado. Everyone else had gone to the basement and they called to her, "Lottie, come on," "Mama, hurry!" But she didn't care. She ran outside to save the duck and by the time she caught it, the tornado was upon them.

In the house she ran to the pictures of the saints hung round her living room walls. She ran, the duck under one arm, her beads in one hand, from saint to saint, and her life was spared. She said novenas for a year, in gratitude to Saint Jude, then she cut the duck's white throat to make *Char-nee-na* (duck's blood soup), a dish her husband loved.

* * *

Someone I Knew

There was a woman whose eyes failed her.
It might have been a kind
of tunnel vision, designed to
save her from seeing the world's
terrible faces.

She was writing her own history.
She said it was
easier than leaving it to
someone else. "Someone else would make
accuracy an issue," she said,
"I will not."

Her hair failed her too.
It rose from her head too proudly,
like stray thoughts.

I am thinking of her
the way you do sometimes, when there
is little else in your mind except
remembrances—images
that do a fast pan across your
droning brain.

So, I am thinking of this failed woman while the sweet
wine in my green glass turns warm and the sky stays right where it is.

* * *

Damask

As a young wife, I'd take evenings
walking out in the vineyards. I thought about getting
all the way to the main road, maybe climb
on to it like it was a conveyor belt
and ride it wherever it would go.

Then the lights would go up in houses behind me
and I'd stop walking, smoke a cigarette
to delay my turn-back, and fish a deep breath
from a grape cluster. Where our driveway sloped up
to the straggly rosebushes, my husband waited.

Years later, promises dissolved,
I drove myself to far-off towns where
I no longer had to be tender,
and the rules shivered like eucalyptus leaves.
There was always something to see,
then nothing to see, and so I turned the car around.
But, it was an adventure, discredited
by its size and still . . . everything.

The times we are in expect a woman
to be thin and beautiful and intrepid.
I make the minor effort and fail.
What is there to believe in save love
which is everything . . . everything?

I tell my daughter not to follow me.
I become stranded too easily.
I'll follow a river just so far along its bedded
contours, then stop—as if a force field grew in front of me—
and not take another step
except toward home.

* * *

Local Color

At the lake,
the swans nearly
levitated. They
moved so smoothly, like cells
splitting and joining at the
beginning of the world. Beauty!
I tossed bread and they ate—looked grateful,
floated—silk winged, breathless. But when I turned
to tear more bread, one stepped ashore, tottered toward
me, bit the back of my leg. It left a mark that
looks like a closed eye and has never disappeared so
that I carry a reminder of beauty's ingratitude—beauty's greed.

* * * * *





Incarceration

(The Last Belize Story)

[Journal]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 86 | October 2013)

We weave through the streets of the shamble town Independence in the police motor train. Hyde ahead, another pickup of khaki goons behind. It is a maze, each trash-strewn street similar to the last. Eventually we pull up in front of a concrete block building. The paint is half peeled off, a shabby desperation enveloping the place. What reject student from Stalinist architecture designed this pathetic hovel? I am led behind the main counter to a small waiting area and told to sit on the hard wooden bench. Wait there. Wait for what?

Ten feet down the bench is a little Mayan guy and his teenage son who is even smaller. A bureaucrat sits behind a tea-sized table and records their conversation with a pencil in a notebook. It is the most protracted story of minutia I've ever not paid attention to. Something about a borrowed rake, what it was used for, who thought they owned it, how the kid tried to work off the rent on it, the dad's retrieval, the arrest of the entire Mayan family, the two dollar fine which is in arrears, such that the wife must stay in jail until restitution is made, the hunt for the now stolen rake, additional charges . . . on and on. The pencil moron scribbles every word down, how they walked up the village street after eating tortillas, etc, etc. After about two hours of this, the Mayans are released but the wife will be held until the two dollars is produced. Hell, I want to pay the two dollars. Get this over with.

My ass is sore on the hard wood. There is nothing to read, nothing to do. Officers wander in and out, giving me a withering look. I feel like I've been there forever. The seconds tick by like a pile driver. *Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!* I watch the notebook fuzz playing with my pocketknife, somehow transferred from the ADHD shrimp. Finally, I am summoned to the reception counter. *Ahh, now I'll get the fuck outta here.* Sign some shit and flee.

On the counter is a huge stone slab. Some kind of Mayan Stella maybe. A very unhumorous quasi-military officer stands beside this ceremonial slab, a scowl in some Indio-African-Mezito mix. He is covered in guns and ammo from his crew cut to his military boots. Producing a huge tube of paint, a worm of black goo is squirted onto the slab, then methodically rolled to an even layer on the rock. Then each of my fingers forced to the stone in turn, slobbered thoroughly with the black. Like little Aztec necks forced against the sacrificial alter. Each digit is rolled on a document in the appropriate place: left hand, third from right, etc. I point out that he has done my left thumb twice, putting left where right should be. If this archaic process is supposed to identify me, I don't want to come out of there with Al Capone's prints. Let's get it right. Cursing, the page is crumpled, the block re-inked, and we start over again. Finally, I'm sent back to the igneous wooden bench with black fingers.

Back in the ocean of bench time. My ass squirming. My terror of the future extending

every moment to eternity. Nothing to distract. Some officers coming and going, bantering to each other in emotional Creole, sounding more like a bar fight than a conversation. No matter how hard I try, I can't understand what the fuck they are saying. The language is devolved beyond reason, beyond rules. Then a huge white man appears at the front counter. Typical of the ex-pat, down here to wallow and spend his money in a miserly way. Three hundred pounds something, 6 foot 3 or 4, head shaved for the bugs, burnt red by the tropical sun. He's bitching that some dreadlock desperado, that he hired to make iron bars to keep the likes of such desperadoes out, has stolen his set of torches. I guess he didn't get the torches behind the iron bars fast enough. The Gran Blanc (great white) knows where this thief hides out. He wants to charge in there with the police and raid the SOB, clubbing and ripping and tearing as they see fit. Three police are assembled at the front counter now, all are cheering on this idea. "Ok, we do it then. Quick thing." They all agree. But still there is a hesitation, not quite a full commitment. I understand what it is. Finally the matter of a small fee for the paperwork is mentioned and the Gran Blanc, catching on at last, produces an American \$20 bill. Enthusiasm resumes for the raid, the time, the method, the spoils, the charges to be pressed. Somehow the "alleged" criminal's rights have been waived for a few nights worth of beer money and supplication to the great white shark.

I sit. And sit. This is driving me crazy. I am worried sick. No one knows where I am. I'm not arrested for anything, just tormented. I whine to the passing pigs to let me talk to the hog in charge. "It ess Capsen Hyde" is all I can get out of them. Some just tell me to sit and shut up. I can feel the day ending. What then? Finally I see Hyde bustling across the little room.

"Oh please, sir. Can't we get this over with and release me. My wife doesn't even know where I am."

"I'm nana gowana do that."

"Oh please, sir. I'll pay a fine, whatever. At least let me call her. Tell her what's going on."

"You take drugs. You guilty, I know it." He sticks his face inches from mine. His eyes are bugged out so far if feels like they are brushing my face. He has the meanest killer look. "You are a drug dealer. I not let you go! Admit you guilty!"

"No. No. Not guilty." He leans further into me with those ping-pong ball eyes, drilling me backwards.

"Admit you guilty!"

"No. Never." He continues to fix me with the headlights in the blackest night for what seems like another hour, but was probably less than a minute. I am nervously glancing away, acting guilty under the optic pressure, increasing his resolve to dissolve my presumed lie. I squirm and cower, but I do not crack. Finally he gives up and walks briskly away. My face feels tanned from eyeball pressure. A pig barks to me to sit back down. I am doomed. So doomed. I hear the birds talking outside of the coming evening. What the hell is happening? I'm supposed to be the cream of the world, white, wealthy Americino, but here being treated like a captured mangy dog while they look for bullets to shoot me. A fine way to treat the meal tickets of this succubus country.

There is more shuffling than usual. New officers coming in, the day ones leaving. It is the shift change. It must be 5 o'clock. What the hell now? Now they have to release me. The party's over. I've been on this fucking bench for seven hours. One of the goons signals for me

to come over to the counter.

“Empty pockets here.” he growls.

“Oh no. I see where this is going. This is wrong.”

“Put things on counter. Take belt off.”

“Uhhh no. No no no. You got the wrong guy. You’re supposed to be releasing me.”

Goon silence.

“Lemme talk to Hyde. This is some mistake. You don’t want to do this.”

“No mistake. Hyde give order.” *Oh fuck*, I think. The order. This is going bad fast.

I comply. I have to. Surrounded by evil glaring police. I pull everything out of my pockets and lay it all on the counter. A fat brutal-looking bitch pig writes everything down in a school composition notebook. Finally I take off my belt. My pants are too big now from the calorie-starved diet in this country and I wear no underwear because of the heat. If I let go my grip on the belt loops I have bunched up in my hand, the britches will drop and my junk will be wagging in the wind. This is a dilemma, to be one-handed in such a situation. Crippled by impending dick exposure. An unanimated guard leads me through the back of the police room into a maze of dark corridors. We seem to be losing elevation, a step here, a step there, as though the place was built on a slope with no correction for it. We enter a narrow battered concrete hallway. There are iron door-frames with inch-heavy screen doors left idly open along the walls. I don’t think this is for really big flies. I’m stopped in front of a steel door with a tiny-screened window the size of a paperback book. I can hear Creole women yelling obscenities down the hall from some other cage. An expectant black face leaps up to the other side of the screened window.

“*Hey nonm. Hey nonm. Kite me ‘sevi ak telephone. Pleiz moun. Pleiz moun.*” I think he’s asking to make a phone call. Begging *please man*.

“*Non gen! Retreat da door, prizinor.*” The dejected face backs away from the door.

“Git shoes off,” the guard directs me.

“And what? Leave em here?”

“*Si, wi coo.*” I slip the ragged tennis shoes off while trying to keep my pants from dropping. I don’t care if the shoes get stolen, although they are the only size twelve in the country. The turnkey creaks open the steel door and ushers me in.

Inside is the horror to be expected of a Central American jail. All moldering and stained concrete, measuring about 9 x 9 with a claustrophobic ceiling seven feet up. There is nothing in there, except two residents. No toilet, no shelves, no beds or blankets even. Just the various microbial slimes and stains on the walls, discolorations on the floor from bodily expulsions over time . . . urine, vomit, and blood. A tiny window the size of the one in the door is on the back wall, just above eye level, covered in a rusting mesh. A few plastic bags litter the floor. Nothing more.

A commonly dressed teen huddles on the floor in a back corner. The guy lurking by the cell door continues to try to get the attention of the guard for some favor, a favor that would be a right in the US. He continues to shout through the door as the guard locks it shut, walks indifferently away.

“*Vini bak. Vini bak. Pleiz moun.*” It is to no avail. The guard won’t come back. “*Faack da koochan idyo,*” he mumbles under his breath.

I see I will not have to fight for my life in here, as I had imagined. I am almost a head taller and twice the weight of these skinny Belizean locals. My enduring nightmare has been

that I would be cast into one of these places, a hole like this, populated with some seven-foot baldy with bootie busting on the brain. There I'd be with my pants falling down (like they are), my white ass hanging out there like a Britney Spears blow up doll in the sex maniac ward. Being prepared to die, I have nothing to worry about here. I move over to a spot on the wall that doesn't look so septic that it will rub off on me. Leaning my back against it in a haughty way, trying to pose a defiant and dangerous posture, my cellmates and I . . . eye each other up.

The kid looks little over fifteen. Smooth face, with a terrified look in his eyes. White shirt, slacks, the police could have dragged him out of a schoolyard. I don't see any blood on him, so his crime couldn't have been too massive.

The other is in the uniform of a Rasta gangster. But he is not hardened, only bitter. While the young one cowers, he struts from side to side, stopping to shout through the tiny window. His dreadlocks come down to his multi-colored shirt and his pants at rest below his waist reveal boxer shorts underneath. He is skinny and quick moving.

I inquire if the plastic bags are anybody's particular property, and when indifferently assured no, I gather a few and fashion a twisted belt. Now I have both hands free, which is comforting. I can hardly imagine spending a day in here with these two. Our personal space is tightly compressed, having little more than a square meter before bumping into each other. I gather that if you have to use the bathroom, you have to signal the guard, who then escorts you to the germ-smeared facility. The guard is not particularly attentive to the prisoners' bodily needs, preferring to nap rather than bother with such things.

"So what are you in for?" I venture to ask the Rasta guy.

"Shee, I doan know boss. I ain't done nuttin. Da mutha fukin pigs jus grabbed me off en da street. Talking all kinna bullshit bout shit I ain't done."

"That's ugly. But it doesn't surprise me."

"Why dat?"

"Because the fuckers will do as they please, just to break up their boredom."

"What you in heah fouda?"

"Not sure. Same kinda shit. I drove through a check point where there wasn't anybody there."

"Ahhh. Doan nevah wanna rides through a check point."

"Fuckers almost shot me." I say with probably a touch of self-pity in there. The Rasta turns away, apparently uninterested in what should be the natural order of things.

The silent one and I sit on the floor in the concrete box while the Rasta guy paces.

"How long they gonna keep us in here?" I ask.

"Dey doan do nuttin on weekends. Den Monday is a holiday, so we gonna be in here for at least three days."

"Uhhhoo," I groan audibly. This is a revolting development. Kim, back at home, will have no idea what has happened to me, nor any way of finding out. There are no computer databases, no interdepartmental communications between police stations. Each is its own little Gestapo kingdom, operating however its Machiavellian mood pleases.

"How can they hold us for three days without charges?"

"Dey required to let you out after 72 hours, but de pigs do however dey please. Dey may hold chew heah fouda a week if de feels like it."

"This is fucked up. Nobody knows where I am." I state out loud to nobody in particular. To myself more than anybody. The Rasta gives me a sidelong look of bewilderment, as if to say

who the hell knows any of us are in here?

"HEY guard! Five-0!" The guy shouts through the tiny window, his neck straining to see sideways down the hall. "Yo gotta let me call Mum Linwood. She know this all wrong. She tell you to get me out."

"*Shatta yo ka me Fuk*" Screams back from the invisible caged women in the other direction.

"*Faak ou puten.*" He shouts back in their direction. Seeming exhausted and defeated, he leans back against the door, adjusting his many layers of pants, first up, then shuffling them down like a well fanned deck of cards. Presently he begins talking in a rambling fashion. "I be working over in Placancia where all de rich white folk live. Wen gen this job fo mum Limwood, ad de grounds keeper. Mum Lim paye mi mighty fin she do, fiftee dollah a day wid a grand lunch. Ah works hard fo mum Lims, trims an chop and ebeen cast de cament. Mum brings mi da cool drink and jive wid me bout tings, like where's I come from and sometimes bout god. She doan like dat mi ain't got no god."

"Yeah. There is no god." I interject. He continues as though I had said nothing.

"She doan seems to mak no judgment on me. Lik she doan care that I dannu who mi papa be. Wawhn day she say dat a preacher fren of her coming to stay fur a bit, which doan mean nuttin to mi whan way or de odder. So de preacher man he come an moves in wid mum Limwood. Ina da next few dais there be all these chillins roaming round da place. Ah hears da precher preaching to dem all da tim. Preacher he come an preach to mi too, teelin me alls about dammnation and brimstone. Ah trys to be polite like but still keep doing my job and nots be to distracted. Some times I sees him take one off de liddle ones off alone and ah hears a lot of yelling and crying. Ah thinks he be hurting the liddle ones. So I tells Mum Linwood dis one time. Tells her dat ah tink da preacher ain't right. Mum she tell me dat he jus working gods way, and the chillins is being showed the lauds path. Couple days ago the whole place be swarming wid the pigs. Turn out whan off de liddle ones wen home to his mama and be crying all de time. De mama inspect him an fin brusies all over him, including brusies on his wee wee. Da preacher mak eim pull his pan down and whack him wid a ruler. Sayin it be da debbils tool an iffin the preacher cain be groping on the weewee and putting god into it, it have to be struck off. De mama go to the poahleece, who thens get all excited and raids Mum Linwoods place. Da poahleece grabe me up too cause dey say I doan look right an mus be in on da mischive wid da preacher. Ah hollers and beg, but id doan doos me no good. So heah ah is. Da preacher he escaped from da police up in da USA where day had him for being a pervert up dere and molesting da school chillen. Now I fuukked in heah." He pauses for a breath. Now getting angrier as he speaks. "Ah ain't doan nuttin. Ah ain't no pervert, no thief, ah ain't no nuttin. Dats waah I's in heah. Cause I ain't notin. Da black man get throwed in jail fo nuttin an set to rot. If you white an got some high paying education, den nobody fuck wid you. Dey all bow down ans takes you orders."

"Uumm. Ya know." I break in. "I have one of those university educations and a white skin, but I'm sitting here with you in this shit hole. They won't even tell me why they have me locked up. So your theory is probably right, but here I am, proof that anybody can be a victim of the pig."

"Humm. Yeah, dat weird. You kill someone or summtin?"

"Wish I did. Feeling like it now. But have not."

The Rasta guy backs off a step. Shifts from foot to foot. We are quiet for a while as he



digests my strange presence. After awhile, he digs in the layers of his underwear. Presently he pulls out a deflated pack of cigarettes and extracts one with obvious delight.

“Yo. You want a choot, mahann?”

“Oh. I wouldn’t want to take one of your last smokes. They do look good though.”

“Id OK, mahann. You take it. We smoke.”

“Ahh, yes. Thank you.”

With another yoga festival of digging, he produces a cigarette lighter. I am quite impressed with this smuggling feat. Who knows which exact fold this contraband has been secreted away in, but at this point, who cares? He lights me up. It feels like the last cigarette as I stand before the firing squad. Each drag is delicious, luxurious, even though the tobacco is little better than roasted cardboard.

I think of all the ways to escape using the lighter. Nothing is flammable in this cell except us. So I could light the quiet kid on fire and beat the guard to death as he comes in to stomp the teenager out. But I have no reason to do the youth harm. He seems depressed enough. Hardly looks flammable anyway, just some polyester pants that probably wouldn’t get the rest going, as there’s no fat, mostly bones. Then the Rasta guy would likely try to kiss the guard’s ass to death—even though he hates everyone, he can only relate as an ass kisser.

OK—better idea. Collect up these plastic bags in here. Get the guard to open the door saying you have dysentery, hurl a flaming mass of plastic into his face. Get the keys. Release the harpies down the hall and herd them in front of me through the front office. Their screaming and yelling would be remarkably distracting, and their fat asses would soak up any stray gunfire. By stabbing them from behind with the keys, they would trample the front counter pigs like stampeding buffalo, and I could dance along behind grabbing the guns. Hmmm . . . this could work. Exactly how many plastic bags do we have here?

I am drawing in the last precious breath of rancid smoke. My fingertips are burning a little. I await the thudding impact of the bullets to my chest as the execution squad empties their guns. Then, at the door, the guard.

“Yo conna git yu up. Bossa he wanna sit yu.” The Rasta guy springs to his feet as I stub out the cigarette coal behind me. “Noo. Not chew. Whit mahann. Nocho?”

“OK. OK.” I get to my feet rapidly, get out the door and pick up my crappy tennis shoes. I am led down a few dark concrete hallways, then confronted with a wooden door. I am ushered into the room, which is also dark. A single hooded lamp sits on a desk strewn with disordered papers. The room is small but crammed with old filing cabinets that are piled with shabby boxes. Other boxes and unidentified trash fill the spaces between. The room seems little more than a converted cell. There is no window. Shadows are everywhere, giving the atmosphere an art noir feeling. I expect a cheap detective in a fedora to be on the other side of the desk. It is Hyde. Against the darkness, he is little more than an outline, a black shadow himself.

“Sit down, Mistah Beyer.” He says in a not too threatening voice. I do so obediently. “Ah call you in to explain.”

“OK. I’m listening. Are you going to release me now?”

“Ah have to tell you that this ah cannot do.”

“What do you mean? I haven’t done anything wrong. You have to release me.”

“No. Ah ham not so sure. You may be ah big drug dealer who is wanted in da States.”

“That’s ridiculous. So you intend to hold me over the weekend?”

"This is what I must do until the information about you can be checked. You see Monday is a holiday and no whan will be available to work on your check."

"I've been here since early this morning. Don't you have computers that can just find this stuff out right away? Why are you torturing me by keeping me here?"

"We take your fingerprints and send them up to Belmopan by email for check. But the computers not work. Fingerprints not arrive there. So we send them again and still the email not work. So we send one more time. Now everybody gone home. Three-day weekend. This is the problem. Nocho?"

Yeah, I Nocho all right. Always it is *this is the problem* when it's actually the fucking problem they made, and the other lazy bureaucrats that can't figure out how to look at an email attachment. So I have to rot in a shit-hole for three days or a week because some sandwich-stuffed asshole can't hit more than one key an hour on the computer.

"Why don't you let me go under the recognizance of the Punta Gorda police where I live? Call the Chief of Police there. He knows me and will take over responsibility."

"This ah cannot do. What if you run? You may escape and then it turn out that you a wanted criminal in the States. How that gonna to make meee look?" There is a nasal whine to his complaint.

As if I give a shit how he looks. He looks like two fried egg whites on an oil slick, the dark enveloping around him.

"At least let me call my wife. She has no idea where I am. She'll be worried out of her mind if I disappear for three days. You have to let me call."

"This I cannot do. You may signal her in some way and try to escape. This is the problem."

"This is no problem. This would be human decency. What is your problem? Why do you have to be such an asshole?" I have nothing to lose now. I can see he is determined to keep me here in his little gulag as a prize white man, a probable criminal.

"You hear about USA guy who hang himself in Punta Gorda on de sailboat?"

"Yeah. Everybody's heard about that. What's that got to do with me?"

"You Americika guys think you can come hide out in our country. He was wanted for big thief cash crimes in USA. Think he can escape here. There no escape here. He get caught and think better to hang heemself."

"I'm not escaping anything. I was driving to the main police station."

"But you did commit a crime. Using someone else's passport is federal crime in the USA. We need to hold you for that crime until the proper authorities can make a determination."

"That was a simple mistake. I've told you that already. I've done nothing. You need to let me go!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Beyer." He actually sounds a little sorry, but I know the son-of-a-bitch is not. We sit there in silence for a long minute. We know the next thing is for him to signal the guard to take me back to the hole for who knows how long. The dark seems to surround us, the little island of light on his desk. It is almost comforting, womb-like, as if looking out mother's navel at the sun.

Then the phone rings. Hyde picks up the receiver. Silence. There is no hello or the usual politeness of the north in phone talk here. Then—

"Yes, Suahaa." His voice is particularly obsequious and demur. "Yes, Suahaa. Ah understand, suahh." A long pause "OK, Suaha. Yes, Suaha." He hangs up. He has a sort of

bewildered look. His eyes wander around in the shadow of his head for a second, unblinking, than come to rest on me, now partially lidded rather than the penetrating previous stare. “I guess this is your lucky day.” Is all he says. I’m sure as hell not feeling to lucky today, but this is sounding like good news.

“Was that the US embassy?” He nods. Who else could it have been? “Does this mean I’m free to go?”

“Yes” is all he says. He appears quite saddened and a little confused. I’m a little confused too. It seem I’ve passed the American background check. Apparently the credit card robbery we financed this trip with is not a reportable crime in America. Probably because it’s called business as usual. I have to remind myself to steal more at the first opportunity.

Out to the front counter where my crap is reproduced. It’s nice to see my belt again. “Where’s my knife?” I ask.

“It not on the inventory list.” The fat pig bitch pig says. The one who yelled at me to get back on the bench. “Dickless Tracy” we call em in the US.

“But they took it from me. They were playing with it over there at that desk. Look in that desk drawer.”

“If it’s not on the inventory list, then you a liar.” Well, fuck the knife, I fume. Fuck these thieves. *Just lemme the hell outta here.*

Out to my truck, which starts wonderfully. The sound of freedom. The sky is red with sunset. It never looked so good. I wonder who that unnamed person is at the American Embassy who took the trouble to make the call, after hours, on a Friday night. Who saved me from endless hours and days in a concrete hole? I want to hug them, thank them, promote them, congratulate them. Americans—who do their job. Who save some faceless Yankee for no reason except a common nationality. Thank you, America.

I feel bad for the Rasta guy still in the hole. I wish there was some way I could get him out. I wish I’d gotten the number of Mum Limwood so I could call her and help spring the doomed bastard. I wish I could shove cigarettes through the barbwire-encased window. Or a gun, but he probably wouldn’t use it. He was right. The white guy goes free. He’s stuck in the hole without hope. I wish I could save him, but I can’t. I have to save myself.

I turn onto the first road and drive. I have no idea where I am, or the layout of this rabbit warren. I try to navigate by the setting sun, but does it go down in the east or west? Even if I knew, that doesn’t help me get out of here. I seem to be on the edge of town. There is swamp on one side of the road, but the shanties continue on almost indefinitely. Getting a little desperate to get outta here and on the highway back to Punta Gorda.

Up ahead, in front of a rundown bungalow are a few people. I’ll ask them how to get out. “Hello. Excuse me. Could you tell me how to get to the highway?”

“*Como? La carretera?*”

“*Si. El calle.*”

“*Uno momento.*” The guy goes back into the house and another skinny coffee type emerges. Walking with a skip. Semi-gangsta dressed. No murderer can phase me at this point.

“Heeeey mann. You the guy who didn’t give me a ride this morning when I ran down to the road. You chance me this morning.”

“Really? Sorry about that. I was in a rush.”

“But I help you out now. I help you get back on highway. Fact I need a ride back to the Maya village. You give me a ride back to village, Nocho?”

"Yeah, yeah, I'll give you a ride. Just show me the way out of this goddamned town." Now that is some weird coincidence. What are the odds of running into this guy in this back alley of a town, and him still wanting a ride from me? Now in the other direction. Very strange. As though fate has me slated to be mugged by this guy no matter what happens. Fine. Bring it on. I embrace my mugging. Any mugging will be more like a massage compared to what I've been through today.

"*Uno momento*. I get stuff. Also we take my brother's wife. She not take up much room. She pregnant, so can't walk too much, Nocho?" Fine. They're all pregnant as near as I can tell. Whatever.

Finally get them loaded up. The little Maya girl doesn't say a thing. This is common with them. People of no words, at least to white people. We have to stop at a crappy looking tiendia for cigarettes, and Vincent (the guy's name) hits me up for five bucks. I buy two packs. I could smoke sixty and set about trying to, chain smoking my ass off. I'd be polluting the unborn baby but the windows are down. The little bugger probably doesn't have a chance anyway, to be raised on a diet of only corn, uneducated, in poverty, riddled with parasites. Its future is brain damaged no matter what.

Vincent is a talker. This is a welcome amusement. I need only interject a word here and there to keep him rambling on and on. I reveal that I've just spent the day in jail, which prompts a lengthy litany of police stories. He feels it's his duty to instruct me how to interact with the pig. The bug-eyed stare down is the macho test applied by all. If you flinch or glance away, you've lost. You are stone guilty. I flunked that big time.

He relishes particularly how he was pulled off a bus and terrorized roadside by a huge pig. "Lemme search you backpack. You got drugs in the backpack." The pig declares.

"You donna wan search my backpack." Says Vincent, puffing out his chest and drilling the partially uniformed thug with his eyes. "I got a pound of weed in this backpack, and you no want to find it." The intensity of their stares multiply up until they are just about kissing corneas, teeth gritted, a trancers' mind melt. Finally the officer collapses under the invisible pressure, first turning his head, then averting his eyes.

"OK. You go now." Vincent won out. He did have a pound of weed in the pack he proudly boasts.

The conversation continues along this vein, how much weed he's smuggled from this place to that place, how much he's smoked, how much the *poahleece* smoke, how to bribe them with weed, on and on. I bore of drug talk, a mix of bravado and stupidity. Not my preferred conversation. He's probably got a pound of weed stuffed somewhere on the Maya girl. I don't want to know about it. Eventually the conversation turns to God, the Maya gods, the nature of fate, the unavoidableness of what will happen. I dispute most of what he says, which gets him more fired up. Ultimately it is declared that the great Ketchi God of the Mayans directs all. The god will do as the people need, ultimately outsmarting the white rulers. But I think to myself, the rulers in this country are all black. The white people are either northern retirees that are near death, Sundance Kids like the sail boat swinger, or Protestant pervert preachers. I wonder why the Ketchi God feels that its people are better served in starvation, crawling with disease and parasites, disallowed by the black rulers from owning land. Apparently it's all part of the master plan.

The black of night envelops us quickly as we chat along, chain smoking, Vincent helping himself to my packs. There must be twenty villages along the way, swarming with

shadowy people along and in the road. I'm in no rush. I crawl along at 20 sometimes, not needing the further complication in my life of mashed Mayans under the truck tires. The girl is let out in a miscellaneous village and Vincent continues on to a bar on the outskirts of my destination. There is talk of my hiring him for grunt work, but I know it will never happen.

At last at home. I stagger up the stairs, dazed and blanched in the mind, un-speaking. Kim hardly seems to notice anything different, my state of shock seeming normal to her. I crave for comfort and sympathy, but she just wants to feed and ignore me, continuing with her evening routine of chores. Eventually I reveal the terrors of the day, stuttering the story out. While I cover the major points, I go about cleaning every scrap of contraband or weed seed in the place, hurling it out into the jungle through the windowless walls. I am thinking that the local police will conduct a raid, based on the incarceration in Independence. But I need not have worried. The two towns are separate kingdoms. It is unlikely they are even connected by phone lines. The police would lose face if they talked to each other. Neither would ever need the other's help or co-operation. Sadly, I hide my collection of Mayan artifacts so well that I never find them again, in which were some jade beads from some un-dug king.

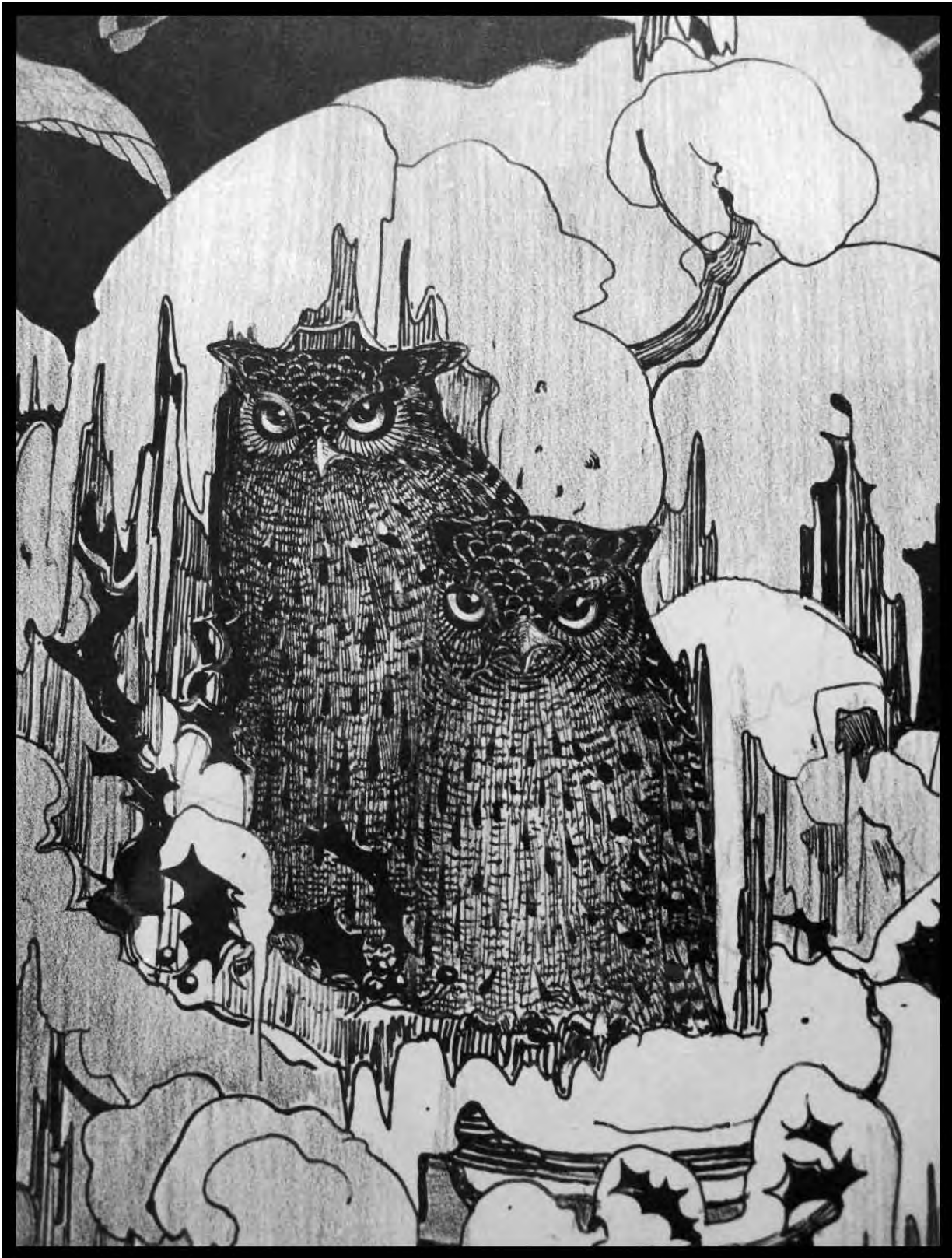
So the dream so long ago . . . last night . . . was a prophecy of horror to come. But I was too stupid to interpret it correctly. Too hurried and brash to consider the thin line that separates me from the whims of the police state. Too myopic to realize the political frenzy of arresting all white men in the hopes of some grand revelation about their criminal past. A newspaper headliner in their country-wide tabloid. For me, a realization that I am the interloper here. Never can this really be my land. Always will I be inspected for the smallest slip. Never can I ever make more than one mistake at a time again.

Epilogue:

The next Tuesday I take the bus to Belmopan and get the blaster's license. I work for the Big Boss, blowing up the limestone mountain for nearly a year—paid under the table. I have a crew of 25 helping me move and pack explosives. They are made up of Mayans, Meztos, Garfunia, and Guatemalans, speaking four languages. It is a wild and dynamic job. I do not slip. I do not make mistakes. The Ketchi God lets me learn from the land as I destroy it.

* * * * *





Theodorus Van Hoytema, "Christmas Eve" [detail], 1894.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts

Judih Haggai

a flock of poems
land on my page
loathe to move

* * *

lips from nowhere
appear in my blanket
lonely for lover

* * *

a terror pervades
as i swirl through space
hoping for connection

* * *

confrontation
clean design
meets reality

* * *

options fly
careful selection
inner guru

* * *

the pine needle
sharp enough
but soft with friends

* * *

buzzing ideas
flutter my dreamtime
until i detach

* * *

fog-filled path
small voices from bushes
where am i?

* * *

again whispers
pull me from sleep
faceless alliance

* * *

the taste of later
infiltrates my mind
music brings me back

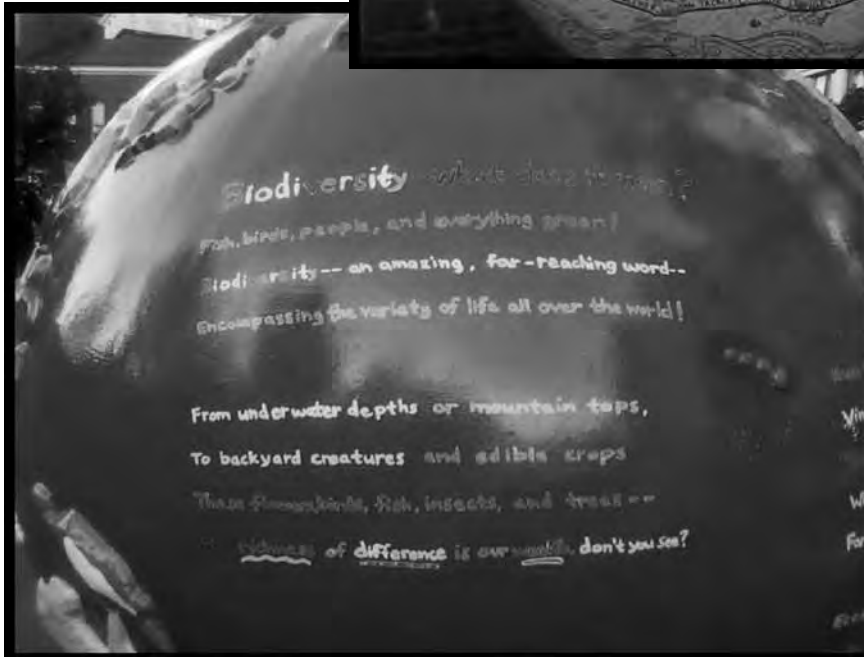
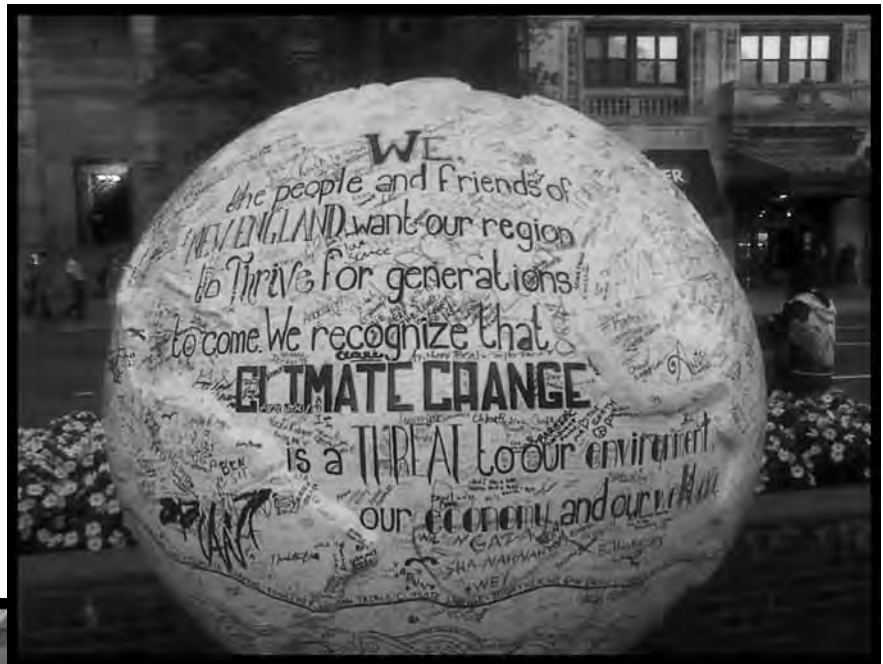
* * *

black waves
call dawn
i cling to sand

* * *

the back of my mind
memories synch with present
undulation

* * * * *



Cool Globes:
Hot Ideas for a Cooler Planet
www.coolglobes.org

Boston, Massachusetts













Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Ninth Series

“Open hands, touch, & teach others how”

xxxi. Sleepers

Now each of you is shown the origin of
the world, its source in Emandia,
& how arrives the Gate to the Island.
Now each of you is given practice
to devote to your art, time to feel
how real it seems through the Dreaming.

Was not always so. We lost many,
in mind or entirely, early on,
thinking it would be quick, we knew
so much, the Hum that signaled
the Gate through time, the juice
created to pursue it, piece together the fall.

We believed it was a series of acts,
a finite number, they could be shifted,
like levers, like Time itself a great calculating
machine we could tinker to a better end.
We would find these acts, in space & time,
& settle one of our sleepers near each one.

But tell it otherwise, no, what happened
was that *the Hum shifted*. The Gate
eluded us & we could not use its power
to repair our history. We found ourselves
at war with the Gate, losing men & women,
helpless to know what could prevent our collapse.

I sought our answer dream within dream
 within dream. Eschewed the Sleeping Capsule,
 the potion of my own hand I trebled
 in strength. Did not wake & would
 have died but for a friend. My old mutt retriever
 would not be so long kept from me in
 my Tower offices. He found me & licked me
 & nudged me & dragged me back to him.

I held him, despairing. His quick breaths,
 his swift beat. How he tended me close
 & how in other times I had tended
 his wounds & ills. And then I realized
 what should have been simple. Not a machine
 with levers. *History is the stuff of of*
blood & bone. Save its body. But more.

The Gate is history's heartbeat.
 It could not save the flesh within which
 it lives. We had to learn what had been
 broken & by what manner to heal it.
 This would be our way going forward:
 bind the wounds, tend the wounds, heal the wounds.

The days & weeks & months & years tired me,
 as I saw human history heal but not recover.
 It was not enough, the world was failing
 to sustain us for our countless ruining hands.
 I wondered if there was something else,
 a potenter magic to be seduced.

I began seeing the Hum as something else.
 A thread. A thread through an impossible
 way I needed to travel, through Time itself,
 past it, what Emandia was, what we are.
 I would go myself, if needed, as sacrifice
 or Hero. *We could not fail.*

xxxii. Sing the Island

Is it silence or is it song when
it begins? The world, the next one,
the countless next one, blue-green,
another ocean planet, waiting to fire,
waiting to bloom, waiting to burst.

But then the Hum, the arrival,
just barely not silence itself, & yet,
& yet. Low singing, so low, searching music,
searching this new watery planet, sniffing
like a Creature for the place to arrive,
the place will sing to be the Tangled Gate.

Arrives the Island, a Beast covered
in trees, arrives & sings the Island,
sings it soft, sings it promise, sings it lure,
accept the Gate, accept the Gate,
accept the Gate. The Island will growl,
demur, beckon, let a little, let a little more.

Sing the Island a vision, a vision of what to be,
what will emerge this union from new & old dreams,
sing the Island a vision honest of old despair,
what has failed before, whyfore this new song.
Sing the Island till the Island pleases no more,
& love fires this universe once & future again.

Now comes the Gate, comes the Gate,
comes the Gate now full & hard,
sings unto the Island, arriving,
arriving, mating, binding, let a little,
let a little more. Grasping, binding, joy.

Now a conjugal song, happy wedded Hum.
The Gate grafted to the beauties of this Island,
to the new truths of this world.
The Gate crafted to sing through time,
love every last Creature of this world. Every last one.



xxxiii. And the Creatures

What found on the Island,
who came to the Island, how the dreams
of men fired through it all.

Always the Creatures, on every world
Emandia sought new home. Always
were the Creatures there, half-found
in what the Island itself grew, but more.

It was agreed she would come first
& if needed lead them all away again.
She was arted for this purpose, & so first.

It was the quirk in her animated nature
that caused them be. Committed to this new world,
unremembering any other, these would be her clue.

Given her kind's yearn, their love of music,
these Creatures would live in the caverns
beneath the Tangled Gate, at the beginning.

What found on the Island,
who came to the Island, how the dreams
of men fired through it all?

These Creatures would also leave the Island,
scatter through history among the world's
homegrown men & women, clues, like their dreams.

If you slept with a Creature in your arms
 when small, dreamed the untellable,
 woke wildly, the night big & silent, you were close.

As you grew, & made your ways through
 the mysteries of want, & men's answers,
 you were further away. Rightly yearned those
 wild, silent nights. Yes, there was unseen music.

When you no longer wondered their fate,
 long given to attract to taller icons
 & thicker books, they continued too.

What found on the Island,
 who came to the Island, *how the dreams*
of men fired through it all.

When the world began to run down,
 it would be again Creatures to your console,
 in one form or another, loving you, leaving you this time.

For she would summon them back to her,
 from all places & times, remembered some things,
 & time to move along, little Creatures, time again.

So the Architect taught the Sleepers,
 find the Creatures if you can,
 remember which ones you knew when
 small & the feeling the wild, silent
 nights, the unseen music, find them when you can.
 When you are near, it helps to hum,
 it helps to sing, it helps to smile.
 Be ready to dance as they are.

xxxiv. The One Who Disappeared

There was only one. She should not have
 been sent. She knew everything.
 How it begins & how it all ends.
 She thought it was funny, like a game.

A very old man had told her when
 she was small, "If you can stay awake
 in your dreams, & begin to look around,
 you will learn strange things."

She told nobody, it was funnier
 that way. She found her Creatures
 in dreams, of course, & they welcomed
 her, of course, with a dance & a song.

Her first lover, chosen more by whim
 than thought, let her down,
 unable to sleep awake in their tangle
 of blankets & candlelight.

Her next lover seemed to know,
 to touch her keys & make a better music,
 but shied off her harder harmonies,
 liked her to moan his night but
 not caterwaul for all creation. *Alas.*

She came to the Sleepers with big eyes,
 a little smarts, a show of wit, a little wit.
 Among the first group sent across the Dreaming,
 hers was the least hard task. Thus
 easiest to elude when she did not return.

She pulled herself whole through the Dreaming,
 no potion had brought her to. Taking the smallest
 form seemed best plan for her travels & games
 to come. A simple dress, big smile, laughing eyes.
 Laughing, perhaps call it like a cackling too.

xxxv. Preparing for the Dreaming

I was the first to cross the Dreaming.
I'd done so years before anyone else,
had created a loose network of knowledge
& contacts before the rest knew, as they
still leaned on leaders & the learned
to stop the crash. I was busy.

There had to be powerful Sleep Capsules,
hundreds of them, constructed in a deep
cavern, below leaders & the wars they
reluctantly tried to slow. The capsules
would gleam white in the lamps upon them,
stone mined in the high mountains
where the workmen labor up single file
with heavy coils on their shoulders.
It would ride in slabs down steep tracks
to where I would ferry it along.

There had to be allies who knew
we were coming, & why, who had already
traced on to our dilemma from their seeds,
some of many, & would give us both
shelter & cover to operate. I found Travelers
in many places & times, beautiful sober-faced
men, eager-thighed women, these would tender
& teach us too.

Crossing the Dreaming was exhausting,
 double since landing was usually in the sea.
 I caused the building of a simple Pensionne
 with doors from many directions. I caused
 its gardens raised up, rooted it all in
 many centuries & places, open to all,
 but especially our Dreaming kind.

I did not cause or coax the White Tiger
 to come. But when he came I knew
 we weren't alone, & my efforts not so desperate.
 I knew further by stories of a Tramp
 met at the Threshold of the Dreaming,
 a tattered man with secret advice.

There was one I regretted leaving behind,
 one Sleeper I felt an oddness for,
 she never mentioned the Tramp.
 When I decided to leave, I weakened
 into her arms the night before.
 I wanted her to take over, her to protect
 them, comfort them if I failed.
 She was a woman with even scantier
 trinkets than the rest, but a single white shell.
 She'd listen to it for hours. These are my
 only regrets.



xxxvi. *Single White Shell*

I listened to the sea. I listened
to the sea. I listened to the sea.
I'd curl into the blue & crimson blankets
of my Sleeping Capsule, nude with my candles
again, & listen to my single white shell.

They would listen too, from afar, they'd
quickly learned for times when I was
not visiting. They listened to the sea.
They listened to the sea. They would tend
my scars & sighs, & listen to the sea.

When you left I knew. You were too gentle
with me, tasted & possessed me to remember,
to say goodbye, like a bloom left obscure
in my heart's chambers, to discover later,
words you didn't have, or refused to give me.

I loved for you to listen to the sea
as I slowly descended your beautiful torso,
kiss by kiss by kiss, you closed your eyes
& listened to the single white shell as I moved
your thighs apart, as I sipped your sweat,

As I licked & teased, as you listened to the sea,
its long ancient roar, its deeper hum
than all, *o you listened to the sea*
as I drank your seed deep into my
throat & then licked my way back to you,

to your parched mouth, your closed eyes,
I kept a part of your seed to drink
with me, drink with me, drink with me,
we drink & we listen to the sea,
together drink your seed back & forth
between us, listen to the sea,
drink your seed, goodbye my love,
listen to the seed, drink your sea,
goodbye my love, goodbye, goodbye.

xxxvii. Next Door

You'd not given me the key or clue
 to what I knew was there, not
 even that last night in my arms,
 not a word. I had to find it myself.

So many lives, I sorted through them
 for one. Not sweet, I needed an edge.
 The dream juice I pressed harder in doses,
 in endangering herbs, pressing myself in.

Found myself with too much heat to bear
 & a skinny young torso to wield.
 I moved from the sloppy groping romances
 of boys to the charging careens of men.

Edging them closer to it, jewel my body,
 but don't touch it, & burn. Clothe me close,
 clothe me tight, burn by my hand in yours.
 Burn hard, *harder*. Nothing. Lust. *Nothing*.

Then one, he saw me, laughed, leaned back,
 sang in a cracked voice of time,
o dear sweet old dirty time leaving
all the old men sad & splayed
in a young girl's careless smile.

He didn't give me a necklace to light
the breasts he sought to bite.
He didn't clothe me to tease his cynical
old cock with hints of my slender hips.
He didn't just try to make me burst of sweet
words spoke in a flaming virgin's ear.

He gave me a lavender candle & a furry
little friend to go my way. "You have
no within yet for yourself, why would
you want a hand or a cock in there too?"

I woke. Lit the candle & let my
friend sniff & lead the way.
We were next door to the Creatures
all along, but thousands years
apart, my friend sniffed twice,
again & again, we went together,
I carried my single white shell, my
best within, the gift I would have
given him, maybe given them all,
if only I was just a girl.

xxxviii. There Is No Demon

They listen to the sea in my
 single white shell, & I want to
 say how, give it all words, so
 they will know me true, &
 this something will release me.

“It was on the beach of the Island,
 that first morning I came.
 I’d been swimming for hours when
 I washed with the tide ashore.”

They gather, listen, sniff. White Bunny,
 several bears, many giraffes,
 I shiver & want to say. Two blue-eyed
 kittees. More sniff & near, I wonder
 if the Imp will cackle up.

“I found this shell in my hand.
 There weren’t any others. It was
 too rocky, inhospitable, yet this shell.
 I listened. I lay in tidal waters,
listening to the sea.”

The Tenders among them emerge
 to sniff me. I am agitated. I talk.
 Talking pushes the something away a bit,
 undoes my panic, I talk.

“Was I her? Was I the demon of the old stories?
 I did not know as I followed her path,
 followed her days, from living on the beach,
 burning with the sun & moon,
 to my approach to the Castle, Dancing Grounds,
 the King, his temple. The Princess.”

I am convulsing they put the shell
 to my ear, I feel my body
 blowing itself out, they put the
 shell to my ear. They begin to hum,
 a brown bear with great brown eyes
 leads them, humming to calm me.

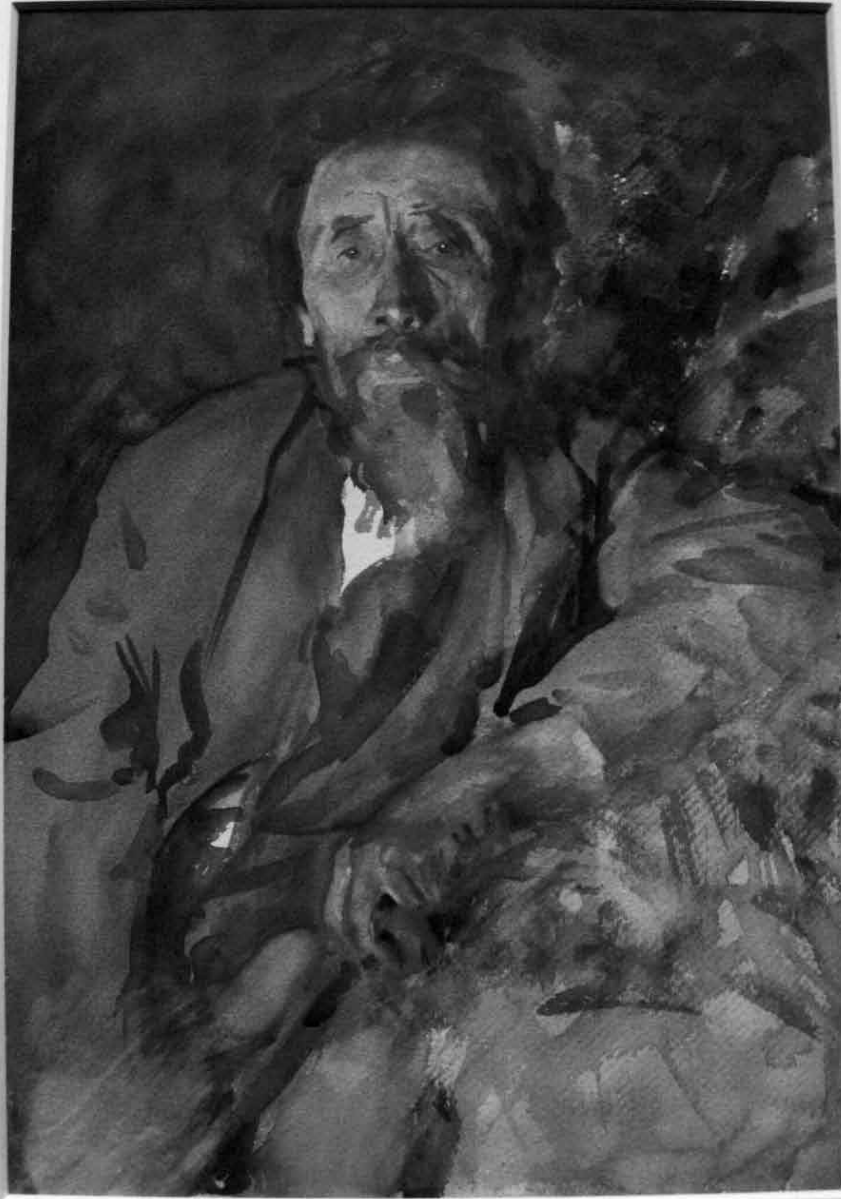
“I follow her down the hall, my other,
 my path, all that has led me
 here, all I have done. She turns back,
 sees me. I see her with my eyes,
 then see me with hers. Then both.
 We cry out, & it’s over. I’m awake.”

I raise up & look about this cavern,
 so impossibly tall, a great tree
 reaching to its heights, look at these
 gathered Creatures. “I was back in
 the sea, where I came from, &
 I lived in silence thousands years.”

“Until?” one asks.
 “I don’t know. I closed my eyes & let it all
 go. Drifted upward from the depths
 I’d been. Landed ashore. Not the Island.
 No Island.”

The something hardly at all in me now,
 I’d spoken my question & been heard.
 There were no answers. I was the demon,
 that’s what they’d called me, the one
 who’d destroyed the King & his Island
 Kingdom.

“There is no demon,” they say. I resist.
 “No,” they insist.
 I return to the Sleepers cavern, thousands
 years later, to my capsule, its crimson
 & purple blankets. The Creatures are always
 with me now. We listen together
 to the single white shell, & often hum, to sing.



**"John Singer Sargent Watercolors" Exhibition,
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts**

xxxix. The Tramp

I had a friend, he was a small exotic,
never knew a word he said. I'd visit
his desert shack, we'd sit on two small stools.
He'd cluck away for hours on end.
We were happy old friends. I'd visit
when I could. Then a day his shack
was empty & he no more.

I tell you this because crossing
the Dreaming is how I felt that
morning, coming to see my friend
at his desert shack. Shack locked.
No stools. Nothing. Crossing the Dreaming,
you will bind, you will be broken,
you will be bereft. You'll return home,
if you can.

Maybe you'll come back. You'll try again.
You want to save the world, it matters,
nothing else is as important to you.
You'll leave family, sweethearts,
the bleak sadness of your end-times.
You'll see me again, nod, pass, we'll
have fewer words. What more could I say?

I could tell you my story, how I
became the Tramp who greets
Sleepers crossing the Dreaming.
I could tell you that once we
didn't need potions & Sleep Capsules
to cross. I could tell you I remained
when the rest turned away toward spikes
to mark the earth, map it, name it,
burn its trees, siphon its fluids, black
its skies, poison its waters. I could
tell you that what you try to save
is what the force of mankind has
been destroying all along.

Or I could tell you that since my friend
has been gone, my step has grown
more & more heavy. I am the Tramp.
I could compel you feel how I walk,
& test your own by it. As you pass
me each time, a nod, a brief word,
a world to save, I could tell you
that what you left behind is what
miracle this world has left to give
you. And the rest are just heavier
steps on your path.

I could tell you this. But I just nod,
think of my friend, maybe I'm wrong of it all.

xl. My Tangled Gate

No more musics for now.
The air is still as I breathe in & out.
The stars dark, the woods bright.
I am dreaming. I am awake.
I love the stories, whatever they mean.
I miss the boy I was years ago.
I live on because men are hopeful
for tomorrow, whatever odds or proof
stand before them.



* * * * *





**“John Singer Sargent Watercolors” Exhibition,
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts**

Nathan D. Horowitz



The Wildest Ones

[Travel Journal]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 86 | October 2013)

*Dedicated to the memory of Randy Smith (1957-2013),
jungle guide and passionate defender of wilderness.*

*The Ecuadorian rainforest
March 27, 1993*

Monkey hunting! Just returned. Pata made short work of the first one: the voice of thunder spoke from his fire stick and resounded across the jungle; a body plummeted through vegetation. Noma hit the second one with a blowgun dart. But it didn't die. He and Pata took off running after it. For nearly an hour they went rushing headlong through the jungle, following the faint rustling at the tops of the trees. The rest of us trailed them. I was crossing a stream on a log when I slipped off and fell in up to my neck. I clambered out, poured the water out of my rubber boots, and pressed on, my wet socks squishing inside the too-small boots.

Noma and Pata passed the older man's blowgun back and forth, taking turns to shoot. Sometimes the monkey would pause in a tree and they would shout at it to continue on. Once Noma grabbed a heavy vine that hung from the canopy of a tree that the monkey had paused in, and he slammed the vine again and again against the trunk, bellowing up at the frightened animal. Pata explained that if it died in the crotch of a tree, he or Noma would have to climb up to get it. Then Pata focused on the monkey, put a dart in the mouth of the blowgun, and took another shot.

A few hundred meters later, the monkey started to become paralyzed from the curare and became confined to one limb of one tree. They took shot after shot at it as it moved back and forth, crying, pleading with them to spare its life, just that once. They laughed.

Pata took a dart and, as I'd seen them do each time, he inscribed a notch around the poisoned tip with a piranha jaw that dangled from the dart quiver. This was so the tip would more likely break off inside the quarry. Then he took a cottony fluff from inside a special gourd and wrapped the fluff around the other end of the dart, about five centimeters from the end. He loaded the dart in the mouthpiece of the blowgun and handed it to me. The weapon was made of a dense wood, surprisingly heavy. I took a deep breath and blew; caught a glimpse of the dart rising, not high, then veering away and getting lost in the foliage. Noma and Pata laughed. "Not bad," Pata said kindly. "You just need to practice."

He took the blowgun back and fired twice more at the dying animal. Finally it lost its balance and plummeted. Pata ran down and fished it out of a stream. It was still alive when he cut a vine and tied the end of its tail to its neck and handed it to me to carry over my shoulder like a wet, furry sports bag with a strap. We set off for home. The monkey asphyxiated on my

back. I was glad I could be useful in at least this way. Back at the hut, Noma's wife—her name's Ayamo, I now know—put the corpse in the fire to char most of the fur off, then cut open the body, discarded certain inedible organs that I couldn't identify, chopped off the head, limbs and tail, put the body, limbs, head and edible organs into a pot with yuca and water, and hung it over the fire, where it's boiling now.

March 28, 1993

Monkey for dinner last night. Pata served me a limb along with my yuca. I ate one section of it, a thigh or a bicep, and handed the rest back. There's lots more where it came from, stewing in the blackened aluminum cauldron over the low, crackling fire. This morning, Noma and Ayamo went out. The entertainment for Pata and me was watching the boys chase each other all around the house, up into the rafters, and out into the rain, throwing spears of long grass at each other. Kowane's currently watching me write, sitting beside me, holding my left knee. He's really pensive at the moment.

Pata asked me this morning, "Europe—what do they do?" When I hesitated to answer, he prodded, "They work airplanes?" (*¿Trabajan aviones?*) I figured he either wanted to know if they work with airplanes or if they make them. I answered that yes, they do. He nodded, partially satisfied, filing the imperfect information away. I had a question for him, too: "Does Noma have ayahuasca?" Pata went to talk with Noma. I wanted to get back into that ayahuasca headspace as soon as possible, and this would be an amazing place to do it. After a long talk, Pata came back with a simple answer: "No." Shit.

He and I talked about ayahuasca. He's never tried it and doesn't want to. He knows a bit about it, though, or thinks he does, anyway. "When you drink ayahuasca, the Devil will come," he informed me.

"But I don't want the devil to come."

"Too bad!" Pata cracked a smile. "He'll come anyway."

Last night I couldn't get comfortable, and woke up several times with various parts of my body numb or just cold. I sleep on a plastic sheet on the bumpy dirt floor. If I put the sarape under me, it doesn't reach around me. The most comfortable way to sleep seems to be in my chinos, but last night they and my t-shirt were wet from when I fell into the stream, so I wore my swimsuit, my plastic rain pants, my silk undershirt on my feet, and my plaid cotton shirt on my torso, and used my rain jacket as a pillow. The sleeping positions of all of us are as follows: Noma, Ayamo and one boy (last night, Tunae) on a small wooden platform between two fires; Pata and another boy (last night, Kowane) in the hammock, perpendicular to the platform and next to one of the fires; and I, parallel to the platform, on the other side of a fire, perpendicular to the hammock. Last night Tunae was using a dirty shirt of Noma's as a pillow, but other than that, nobody has used any extra clothes, blankets, or anything like them to sleep. Body heat helps, and keeping the fires going all night.

In a dream, I'm at the house where I grew up. My stepfather, Walter, is there, warning me that there might be someone in the attic. Apprehensive, I go up there, and find two Walters, or Walter and his identical twin brother, who doesn't really exist. When I woke up, I reflected that there was no trace of my mom in the dream. That worries me, since she appears frequently in my dreams. Maybe she's dead. Ever since news of her brother's death came to her over the psychic telegraph wire, I've been in the habit of searching my dreams for clues

that somebody has died. I lay there in the dark, listening to the Waoranis breathing in their sleep, and I thought about my parents. They both came close to dying in the past year—breast cancer, heart attack—and were saved by medical technology. They would have died if they'd been Waoranis, Secoyas, or Coras. And how will I feel when they really die, one and then the other? I'll deal with it. It's the kind of thing you can only deal with. *Aguántalo*, Joaquín said. It hurts, and hurts, and hurts, and hurts, and little by little you feel a little better. When I was a kid I used to wake up crying, imagining that one or the other of them had died, imagining how I'll feel when it does happen; imagining going to the shore of a deserted lake and yelling and screaming and trying to be heard by them, and not getting any answer. I still feel sheltered by them. When I went outside at dawn, wondering if my mom's breast cancer had recurred, I thought, *Maybe I have a few good years in store before tragedy strikes again*. I paid some dues when I was younger. I spent some time in Hell.

It's curious that now that Walter's ("Nanda! Nanda!" my hosts shout. Some kind of big water mammal, maybe capybara, maybe otter, is cruising down the river in front of the house) gone, my mom and dad are suddenly so sweet on each other. My dad's always been sweet on my mom, but now she's gotten to the point of reminiscing fondly about their honeymoon. For nine months between 1966 and 1967 they wandered like Adam and Eve from Israel to Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, England, and Ireland. When they returned to the States she was pregnant with me.

When I was a kid, I fantasized sometimes about my parents getting back together. I still think it's slightly beyond the realm of possibilities. But only slightly!

My mom even told me recently how she became interested in my dad: she saw a charcoal drawing he'd made. It was on a big sheet of paper and it depicted a crouching female nude. The remarkable thing about it, she said, was that he had drawn it with a single line, without taking the charcoal off the paper. It occurs to me now that I owe my life to that line. Maybe that's why I'm so fond of curving lines and so averse to straight ones.

Chiaroscuro. In keeping my eyes out for a wife, for many years, I've been looking for someone who wouldn't do to me what my mom did to my dad. At the same time, I've been unintentionally enacting psychodramas with my girlfriends that replicate what I think happened between the two of them. With Jennifer, for instance. Soon after she and I got together, I lost interest in her personality, and when she broke up with me, I was crushed and wanted her back. At least with Lily, I don't feel like I'm playing that same game.

I'd like to stay in the forest until I figure out my life. I'm sick of walking around harming myself and others. Here, like in Mexico, I don't feel like I'm on a treadmill. My mind doesn't endlessly loop crazy thoughts. The forest is strong enough to break through all that. Or I'm strong enough here to do it myself—a large mammal roaring defiance of all that has ever sullied his soul.

Pata is watching me write while he fans the flames under the cooking fire with the black paujil-feather fan. Now he reclines in the hammock to open and close the many blades of the Victorinox Swiss Army knife that the last visitor gave Noma.

Earlier, I asked about the visitor.

"She was a scientist," Pata told me. "From Chinamarca."

"Dinamarca [Denmark]?" I said.

"No, Chinamarca."

"China?"

“No, Chinamarca.”

“There’s no country called Chinamarca.”

“There must be,” he corrected me. “That’s where she was from.”

“OK.” No sense in arguing the point. I’m apparently in an alternate reality where there’s a country called Chinamark. That’s OK with me. I wonder what the people there look like—blond with narrow eyes?—and how their society is organized, what their literature discusses, what their traditional dance and clothing look like.

In the other dream I remember from last night, I go into a cave where Noma lives. He’s sitting on a hammock, chatting with Pata, who’s standing. Ayamo and the boys are around. Somehow as a result of the monkey hunt, Noma has a gaping hole in his torso, like the monkeys when Ayamo butchered them. Internal organs are visible, hanging in the cavern of his body. The wound doesn’t bother him. When the cavern that is the hole in his body conflates with the cave that we’re in—so that his organs grow larger than whole humans and dangle from the walls and ceiling—I realize it’s a shamanic thing. And an instance of *inlakesh*, that Mexican idea Alberto told Franco and me about: “I’m another you.” In killing the monkey, Noma embraced his own death. He is what he killed and what he killed is him.

On the sixth morning it was time to start heading back. Pata and I said goodbye to Noma and his family and set out for Pata’s village, an eight-hour hike away. I put on the size 43 rubber boots. Every step impacted my toes. The path led up and down low hills. The rain started and stopped and started again. After two hours Pata offered to exchange packs with me. The Waorani was much smaller than I but much stronger, and he good-naturedly shouldered the heavier burden. After two more hours he remarked that we were going too slowly to make it in eight hours. Then he suggested another rest. I lay flat on my back, panting for air, then yanked off my boots and massaged my toes. Pata, alert, curious, politely posed a question that had apparently been on his mind for a while. “The world,” he said, “what shape is it?”

I lay still, letting the question wash over me, watching the trees that surged up to the sky, before starting to answer. I’d read in the Explorers Club that the Waorani traditionally believed the world was flat, and I gathered that Pata had heard that outsiders had a different idea. Coincidentally, I’d recently been thinking that if one figured in the fourth dimension, time, the world would look something like a complicated, elongated corkscrew as it spun through revolutions around a sun that revolved around the center of a galaxy that moved through the universe away from where the Big Bang happened. But I couldn’t explain that in Spanish.

Thinking back to Cola’s question, I remembered from my college class in Astronomy that no one really understands how gravity works. I began tentatively, “We used to think the world was flat, like you-all do. Now we think it’s round, like a ball. Maybe in the future we’ll see it differently. But it seems to be like a giant ball, and it’s so big that it looks flat from where we stand on it, but when you go up very high you can see that it’s round. And somehow, everything sticks to it. No one knows exactly why, but when something is very, very big, it pulls on other things.” Pata nodded and seemed partially satisfied with this explanation, maybe because it recapitulated what he had heard before.

We set out again. Soon there was no more path. A while after that, Pata remarked, without slowing down, “We’re lost.”

As I stumbled on, and the earth sped through space on its attenuated corkscrew path,

I numbed my body and withdrew into my mind. Memories rose and fell. The rain came and went. Every step I took, my toes jammed into the tips of the boots. I was afraid I might lose the nails of my big toes. I moved ahead robotically while pondering my unhappy relationship to my parents. *I'm a fuck-up. I lean on them. They give financial support to their fragile, emotionally damaged only child in hopes that he may one day become well. For my part, in relying on them, it's like I'm suing them for the mess they made of my early childhood. When will I get beyond this and stand on my own? I need them to help me, which convinces me that I'm weak, so I need them to help me again.*

I remembered the boys gently leading me by the hand from place to place as if I were a large wild animal in the process of domestication.

I remembered Noma, a shaman without ayahuasca, who never looked at me directly except when handing me a monkey limb from the pot while beaming a huge grin—this man who survived by murdering and eating his karmic doppelgangers in the forest.

I remembered the time I stood up too quickly in the hut and got a head rush. When that happened in the United States, I'd feel an overwhelming self-consciousness, a certainty that others around were thinking unflattering thoughts about me, their negative impressions confirmed by the fact that I was standing there swaying with a spaced-out expression on my face. I was too embarrassed to ask anyone about this and thus never learned if it was pure paranoia or not. This time, though, I felt an equally-strong sense of comfort. No movement into the spirit world as had happened on the hill above El Nopal, but a feeling that everything was happening just as it needed to. Specifically, it didn't seem odd that I was visiting these strangers in a hut in the jungle. It seemed the most normal thing in the world.

I remembered my hostess Ayamo, with her missing front teeth and the open sore on her left buttock that I smeared with disinfectant gel but probably should have scraped out and washed first; and the imprint, when she turned over, of the weave of the palm-fiber hammock on the skin of her breasts. And the time she and I were alone in the hut and she looked at me as if inviting me to make love to her. This made me imagine vectors of HIV transmission through the hookers of Coca, and then what it would be like to be body-pierced by her husband's barbed spears, maybe just one of them, maybe many of them until I looked like Labaka after the Tagaeri had had their way with him. Next, it occurred to me that I didn't want to risk fathering a child that would grow up a stranger to me. And finally, I thought about it in terms of being faithful to Lily—which struck me as curious, now, as I trudged through the forest banging my toes into my boots: It's a strange sort of morality that lets me have an affair with a married woman but won't let me cheat on her. In sum, in the moment the offer was made, I froze, and Ayamo turned back to the basket she was weaving.

When Pata got back from hunting that day, he and I were talking, and I said something to him about Noma being Ayamo's husband, and Pata said no, he's not her husband, he's her father-in-law, it's just that her husband drowned because he couldn't swim and his wife died too, so the two of them live together now and raise the boys.

As I trudged behind Pata, trying to walk on my heels and the sides of my feet to save my toes, I thought how strange it was that people would live their whole lives along rivers but be unable to swim. I supposed it was just a development that had never happened in their culture. A valuable skill to have.

Death by drowning, death by sickness, death by spear. I wondered again what death would be like when it happened. When I was small, my mom explained it as like a candle



being blown out. One moment there's life and light, the next moment nothing at all. The extinguishment of being. The void. This image hit me hard late one summer night in 1974. I was six, on a trip to New Mexico, in the way-back of the family's four-door reddish-brown 1971 Chevrolet Nomad, which was surging through the darkness. Occasionally a streetlight flung a white spider web across the ceiling of the car. My two older stepbrothers and my older stepsister, all teenagers, rode silently in the middle-seat. My mom and stepdad were in front, one driving, the other navigating, trying to find a campground. For some reason, or for no reason at all, I thought of the candle going out and became terrified. I wept convulsively, and screamed, over and over, "I don't want to die! I don't want to die!" as the road raced by below.

I followed Pata onto another fallen log across another stream. *That must be why I write*, I thought. *I want my thoughts to live on after me*. There was mud on the log. Pata halted and exclaimed, "Look. ¡Tigre!" He pointed to a big jaguar footprint in the mud. It must have been fresh because rain had been falling half an hour before. I stared at it for a second before revisiting my six-year-old self. As I crossed the fallen log, the Nomad changed into a jaguar on whose back I was riding. Then I was in a helicopter flying over a dark jungle. What had Labaka felt when he went out to die?

I'd witnessed a weird episode on about day three when the family heard the sound of an oil company helicopter. They and Pata got really excited and ran outside the hut and jumped up and down and screamed and waved at it until it disappeared. I was ashamed of them. They were acting like children, even dignified Noma.

Now, though, I figured they must have been thinking there was a chance the copter might drop down something good to them.

Stop foot! A loop of vine halted me suddenly. I disentangled from it and walked on.

I passed a cluster of red and yellow flowers growing on the trunk of a tree as if they'd leapt up from the ground and clung there. They brought me back to the flower gardens my mom used to plant in the springtime in front of the house. At the edge of the dirt, where it met the sidewalk, she maintained a row of round, gray fieldstones, half-buried; behind them she'd plant a row of marigolds like lion-headed soldiers, to keep out the bugs; then snapdragons snarling, their yellow maws agape; then the rest of the jostling, brilliant throng. At the back, near the bushes, tall, spindly, bifurcating stalks like long green sparks presented to the sun lavender flowers with yellow centers. My mom told me these were called cosmos. I knew things often got their names from what they looked like and I wondered if these were shaped like the universe.

The garden's perennials grew by themselves, but the annuals, including the marigolds and the snapdragons, had to be bought mostly-grown from a nursery in a huge, fragrant greenhouse down by the Huron River. Another vine caught my boot and I skidded to a stop, unhooked myself, and was back in the memory, a small kid staring at a table laden with pansies. Their purples and yellows were so intense as to blot out all other sensations until my mom called me to follow her to the counter, where she wrote out a check with the Pilot ballpoint pen she always carried, and we began to carry the plastic flats full of swaying, half-grown flowers to the Nomad parked outside.

And always, again, the pounding of toes into rubber boots. A snatch of more recent dialog echoed in my head: my mom saying, "You're running away from something," and me countering, "No, I'm running toward something." I imagined speaking reasonably to her: "I think the mythological way of seeing things and the scientific way of seeing things are both

valid. They're like our two eyes. Neither one of them is all-knowing, but they can work together and give us depth perception, and a better view than we would have with only one of them." This was a concession on my part. But she didn't buy it. In my head, her voice responded with no specific content, just the tone, dismissing what I was saying. It felt like a stab in the chest. I lost my patience and raged at her. "You don't want me to take drugs. Would you rather I was a *chainsmoker* like your dad? Would you rather I was an *angry drunk* like your brother? You taught me to think independently. You taught me to follow an idea to its logical conclusion, exploring it every step of the way. And now that I'm doing those things, you don't like the results! Even though it was *your methods* that brought me here! I used the intelligence that *you developed* to form my vision of the world, and now you want to stomp out that vision like so much burning paper! I won't let you! NO!" I felt myself punching her in the mouth with all my strength.

I halted, swaying, holding onto the mossy trunk of a tree, anger melting into remorse. *Breathe*, I reminded myself. "Pata," I called, "I need a break."

He stopped and opened a plastic bag and we snacked on soft yuca chunks that Ayamo had boiled for us. When we were walking again, a picture book bobbed up amid the wet trunks of the trees. My mom or stepdad had left it on a low shelf. Alone, I opened it. It contained photos from the Vietnam War. A suspected Viet Cong faced the camera with his hands tied behind his back and blood streaming from his smashed nose and mouth. Another photo showed another VC being executed by being dragged by his feet behind a halftrack down a road in the jungle. Though only six, I could already read, and I learned the word "halftrack" from the caption. I knew that my country was to blame for the torture, and I was ashamed.

But I was beyond that now. Many years later, I was in a different jungle hurrying to keep up with a man who looked like a sturdy Vietnamese as he tried to find the way to his home village. The thought that we weren't in a war zone made me suddenly happy. Another red and yellow flowering epiphyte on a tree trunk reminded me of my mom's garden again. I wished I could show it to her. I imagined saying to her, "Mom, I've recently had an experience that's changed me forever, a ceremony that's put me in touch with the hidden springs of life. I love my life again and I have a purpose. I'm very happy and I want to share that with you." And this time she didn't say anything, just smiled.

A fantasy.

At dusk, Pata called a halt, built a lean-to shelter, kindled a fire. After sharing with me a light dinner comprised of most of the rest of the yuca, he plucked a bunch of big stiff leaves and drove their stems into the ground one by one so they stayed upright and delineated a low barrier around the lean-to. I said, "What is this?" Pata answered that with the leaves and the fire, the jaguars wouldn't attack us. *Really?* I thought. *A wall of leaves?* I wondered about this before sinking into unconsciousness.

Hours later, accompanying a shifty white man, I enter a cottage where an elderly African-American couple live. My companion plans to cheat them out of their scanty possessions. We all sit down at a table. The swindler begins his evil work, offering a small mirror in exchange for a huge, fresh fish. The man just gives him the fish, saying, "Keep your mirror, I already have one," and indicating a large mirror on the wall with an ornate frame. The swindler offers a plastic rat-tail comb for the wall mirror and the older man stuns him by taking it off the wall and giving it to him. The woman explains that for a few months, her husband has had the power to fish for whatever he's wanted. He goes down to any body of water, be it ocean or

puddle, wishes for something, throws in his line and pulls out whatever it is. They're not sure if the power is in him or in the fishing pole he uses, but either way, they don't feel comfortable accepting someone else's possessions in exchange for things that are given so freely. The woman shows us two photos, from their recent vacation in California, of her husband effortlessly pulling a Cadillac and a killer whale from the waves.

The scene changes and I'm in a house with my father and my father's father. I have some of the spiritual power that the old black man had. I take a knife and cut off the hand of a dead man who's lying on the floor. I transfer the knife to my left hand and painlessly cut off my own right hand and affix the corpse's hand to the stump. Just to prove I can. My new hand works perfectly, though it's smaller than my old one, and there's a scar around the wrist. I'm proud of myself, and walk around flexing my new right hand, hefting my old right hand in my left.

I note again the discrepancy in the sizes of my hands and it hits me that the operation I performed is permanent. I'll always have a dead man's hand in place of my own perfectly good one—which starts digging its nails into my left palm, asking to be put back on its wrist. It's still alive, and it's as warm as it ever was, and it feels exactly the same to my left hand, but I can't feel its sensations: it's numb to me. And it has its own unfamiliar weight and personality.

I go to my grandfather for help. I can only see the top half of his head. He exclaims, "Noma! He makes gold hands." By this he means that the shaman is behind what happened. There are two possible scenarios: either Noma performed the operation and deluded me into thinking I'd done it myself, or Noma made me imagine the whole episode, and the hand I think is a corpse's hand is actually my own, on my wrist, right where it belongs.

When I woke up with my hands back to normal, I thought the old couple was the forest, able to produce anything and giving it away for free. I had some of that nature magic, but I abused it—and yet maybe I'd only been tricked into thinking that. I told Pata my dream and he nodded and told me one of his in which he rode across an ocean on the back of a turtle and ate soup with a white woman.

We finished off the bag of boiled yuca. On my abused feet I put a pair of dry socks and the rubber boots and we slogged off toward Pata's village.

We arrived shortly before midday. The trip he'd thought would take eight hours had taken twelve.

I stayed in the village for a couple of days, eating armadillo meat and *naranjillas*, sour-sweet orange fruits that grew on bushes around the village; sleeping on the dirt floor of a hut, wrapped in my sarape on top of the skin of a jaguar; and watching the nails of my big toes turn black. Then I again requested to be alone in nature, and this time the people let me move into a deserted house on the bank of the river near the village so I could fast from food and water for another five days. Surrounded by the buzzing, squawking forest, I sculpted human faces out of clay, hungered and thirsted, observed capybara tracks, and wrote letters to Lily and lists of foods I wanted to eat. I didn't have any spiritual experiences there, just was happy to be by myself while hoping that Miguel, Pata's brother, would come and pick me up with his speedboat.

When the five days were over, Pata collected me in a canoe. He said, "Last night I dreamt that my brother came down to pick you up. That means he'll be here tomorrow."

I broke my fast with *naranjillas* and wondered about Pata's prediction. The next day, in fact, it came true: at midday, Miguel appeared on the river in his silver speedboat, spent an

hour visiting, then brought me back upriver to his village at the former oil camp where the highway began.

I remembered what Jeremy Carver had said about Waoranis checking him out through his dreams. There might be something to the Waorani dream thing, I thought. How long would I have to stay around here before I could do it myself?

Back in Coca, among hookers and oilmen, I experienced the effects of a strong intestinal upset. Although I'd purified all the water I'd drunk, something had gotten to me, probably the half-cooked monkeys. Maybe the reason I didn't have any spiritual experiences on my fast was that millions of microbes were banging each other in my sacral chakra.

Sick, I made it back to Quito. Those two toenails fell off. I watched a play and got stoned with a deaf guy I met in a hot tub at a public bath. Then I flew up to Mexico City and took a bus to Guadalajara.

Savoring a beef tamal in my friends' kitchen, scratching a dirty white dog with my bare foot, gazing at the crack in the paint I remembered from before, I reflected that my visit to Ecuador had pushed me further than I'd been comfortable going, especially the Waorani part. Killing the baby monkey, eating its mother's charred limbs, the Tagaeri menacing my guides and me, the hike that knocked the nails off my toes, the storm in my guts—the cumulative effect of these things disturbed me more than I'd expected to be disturbed. I remembered the story I'd read about jungle raiders kidnapping and raping women. I was far from having been raped, and most of what had happened to me had been consensual, but my boundaries had been crossed and I'd been taken a bit brutally by the experience.

Overall, though, my journey had been a great success. In the eight months since I'd left the States, I'd become fluent in Spanish. I'd stayed with indigenous people and integrated myself temporarily into their worlds. And in the ceremony of yagé I'd experienced astounding joy and been welcomed into the tradition.

I murmured Nezahualcoyotl's prayer when I'd swallowed the last bite of tamal: "Thank you. I want more."

My friends put me in the sky-blue VW Beetle and drove me to a free clinic to deal with the intestinal problem. The microscope slide of my fecal sample created a sensation. All the staff wanted to peer at the exotic rainforest parasites.

I headed off on a series of buses, trucks, and freight trains toward Texas. Along the way, as the medicine the doctors gave me was taking effect, I received a dose of peyote from an Argentinian traveler and felt millions of tiny creatures screaming as they died inside me.

When I reached Ann Arbor, I found I was single. Lily had just moved in with a new boyfriend. My mother welcomed me back home, a prodigal son in need of a haircut. I found a job as a barista at the Café Trieste in the center of town and started to save money to go back to Joaquín's place. It was fun working at the café. I gave away coffee to all my friends, and soon I had a lot of friends. When business was slow, I told them about the monkey-eating Waoranis, the opium-growing Coras, and the Secoya wizard with his potion that transformed mild-mannered me into a roaring creature of the forest.

* * * * *

W. B. Yeats

Leda and the Swan

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

* * *

Among School Children

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
 A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
 The children learn to cipher and to sing,
 To study reading-books and history,
 To cut and sew, be neat in everything
 In the best modern way—the children's eyes
 In momentary wonder stare upon
 A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
 Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
 Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
 That changed some childish day to tragedy—
 Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
 Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
 Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
 Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
 I look upon one child or t'other there
 And wonder if she stood so at that age—
 For even daughters of the swan can share
 Something of every paddler's heritage—
 And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
 And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
 She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats into the mind—
 Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
 Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
 And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
 And I though never of Ledaean kind
 Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,
 Better to smile on all that smile, and show
 There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
 Honey of generation had betrayed,
 And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
 As recollection or the drug decide,
 Would think her son, did she but see that shape
 With sixty or more winters on its head,
 A compensation for the pang of his birth,
 Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
 Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
 Solider Aristotle played the taws
 Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
 Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
 What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
 Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,
 But those the candles light are not as those
 That animate a mother's reveries,
 But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
 And yet they too break hearts—O presences
 That passion, piety or affection knows,
 And that all heavenly glory symbolise—
 O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
 O chestnut-tree, great rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

* * *

Easter, 1916

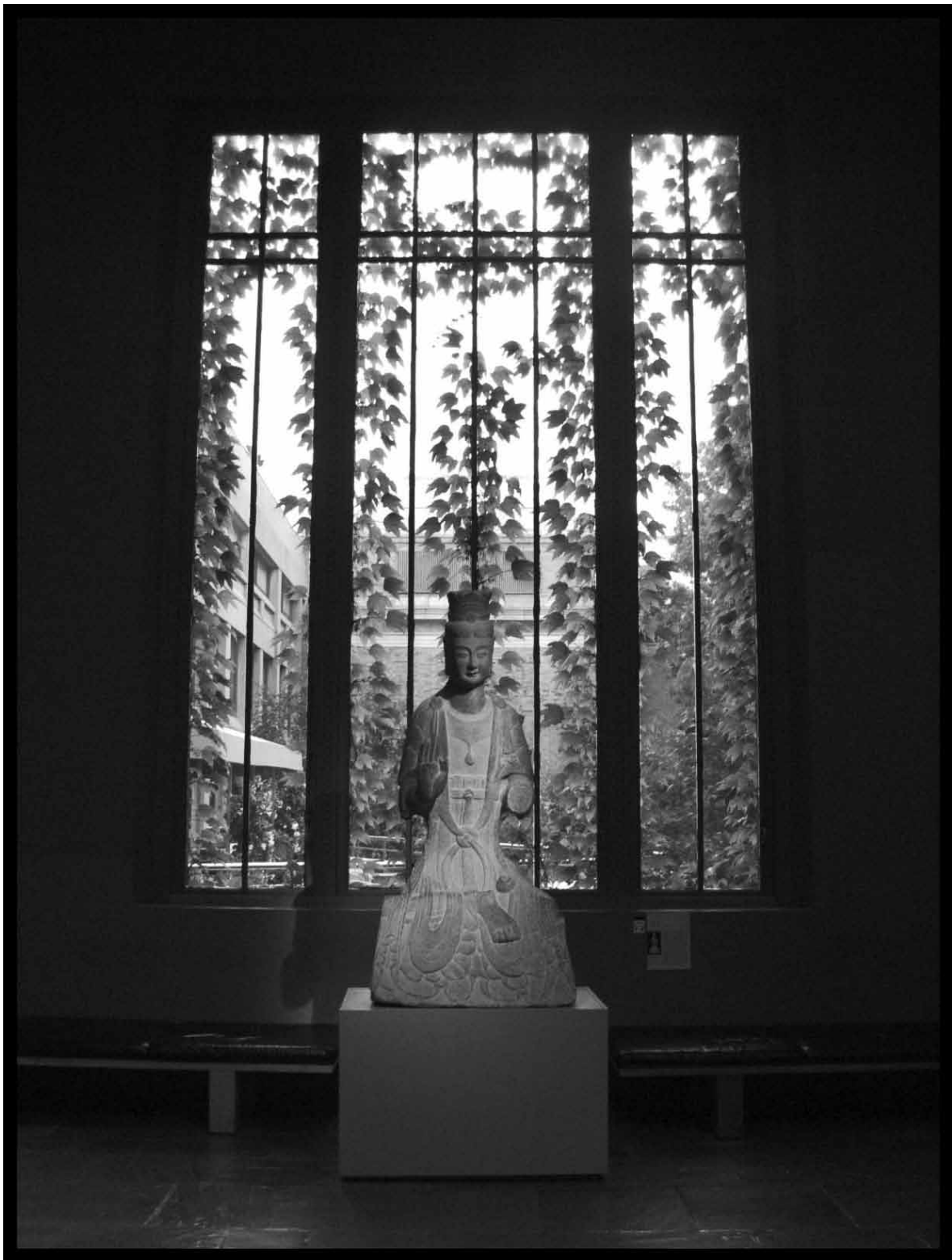
I have met them at close of day
 Coming with vivid faces
 From counter or desk among grey
 Eighteenth-century houses.
 I have passed with a nod of the head
 Or polite meaningless words,
 Or have lingered awhile and said
 Polite meaningless words,
 And thought before I had done
 Of a mocking tale or a gibe
 To please a companion
 Around the fire at the club,
 Being certain that they and I
 But lived where motley is worn:
 All changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent
 In ignorant good-will,
 Her nights in argument
 Until her voice grew shrill.
 What voice more sweet than hers
 When, young and beautiful,
 She rode to harriers?
 This man had kept a school
 And rode our wingèd horse;
 This other his helper and friend
 Was coming into his force;
 He might have won fame in the end,
 So sensitive his nature seemed,
 So daring and sweet his thought.
 This other man I had dreamed
 A drunken, vainglorious lout.
 He had done most bitter wrong
 To some who are near my heart,
 Yet I number him in the song;
 He, too, has resigned his part
 In the casual comedy;
 He, too, has been changed in his turn,
 Transformed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone
 Through summer and winter seem
 Enchanted to a stone
 To trouble the living stream.
 The horse that comes from the road,
 The rider, the birds that range
 From cloud to tumbling cloud,
 Minute by minute they change;
 A shadow of cloud on the stream
 Changes minute by minute;
 A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
 And a horse plashes within it;
 The long-legged moor-hens dive,
 And hens to moor-cocks call;
 Minute by minute they live:
 The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice
 Can make a stone of the heart.
 O when may it suffice?
 That is Heaven's part, our part
 To murmur name upon name,
 As a mother names her child
 When sleep at last has come
 On limbs that had run wild.
 What is it but nightfall?
 No, no, not night but death;
 Was it needless death after all?
 For England may keep faith
 For all that is done and said.
 We know their dream; enough
 To know they dreamed and are dead;
 And what if excess of love
 Bewildered them till they died?
 I write it out in a verse—
 MacDonagh and MacBride
 And Connolly and Pearse
 Now and in time to be,
 Wherever green is worn,
 Are changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

* * *



The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

* * *

Sailing to Byzantium

I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

* * *

The Choice

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all that story's finished, what's the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

* * * * *



Tom Sheehan



Backstairs

Every riser has a name,
top to bottom, all sixteen
that throw triangle's shadows
when evening begins its under-
tow,

when it turns day on itself.
Jimbo, the top riser, ace
of aces, with the moniker
my brother carried into Lake
Erie

in the January madness of '70,
prince of all human princes
so savage and unreal in memory.
I kick the dark side of him
nightly,

rap the two hundred-year-old oak
with my steel-toed boots, shake
him out of that deep sleep, bring
him woodenly into the room
of long memories.

The bottom riser, the up-starter,
Peter's rock of rocks for us,
is *Jim*, the old redheaded Marine,
Nicaraguan path-finder in old days,
Contra-less.

He brought four squared-off tics
home in a red leg patch, *Central
American tattoo* he called it,
a raw map of his indelible jungle
warfare.



Even when the August moon spills
its salad dressing on these boards,
or falls like an October cheese
on hard-jammed verticals, I hear
his voice.

Steady, heads up, hold the fort.
Remember me sometime dreaming for you,
come riding on the long ropes of dark-
ness all these years hang on, bridge
over jungle

hanging between souls slammed apart.
He left his words overt as road signs,
route-haunters, role-setting, square
as any truing mechanism, plumb bobs
of verbs.

Midway of this climb, eighth up
and about where my eyes flatten out,
rises *Cuz*, Warren of the 43rd,
Patton's boldest scout, eagle-eyed
killer,

saw Panzers under hay, barned,
moved sure as a pointer in the field
of Europe, shook loose from cover
the iron fledglings, came home
miraculously.

On my father's shoulders, second
off the ground floor, rock-ribbed also,
honey-warm, true as Mercator's bearings,
mapped for life by grin and grit,
is Edouard.

When I step on him, he shrugs back
to let me know he is staunchly there,
endless cinder, unsmashable stone,
constant as old Nahant's
inevitable tide.

Never a voice raised in fifty years,
 no foul name called out at twilight,
 no curse or carping word, no spite
 or brickyard epithet, nothing less
 than belief.

“I,” I constantly say, “am the lucky
 one, I who have this step to tread on,
 who has this rock-oak slab of Edouard,
 one fast friend in all of lifetimes,
 near brother.”

Children rise here endeared;
 my shortstop, my catcher, karate master,
 my lost artist, my past mother,
 my new mother, my seed spread.
 Oh fired wafers,

Oh listeners of my rising nights,
 my step up in the backstairs darkness,
 my climb to dreams, all this oak's mere
 echo as I climb booted and bred
 of desires.

Later, as I am about to descend, calling
 out the other names underfoot, kicking them up
 to the latest versions of step-on company,
 wishing just one more moment of touch,
 the ache knows itself.

Gandy Dancer of the *Phoebe Snow*

You began right in front of me today.
 I don't know where you came from,
 patient muscles hanging loose in your
 soil-painted, dark-blue suit coat,
 one pocket ripped to a triangle,
 one pocket stuffed oh so properly
 with a coffee-filled paper-wrapped
 pint bottle, your thin legs nailed down
 into a pair of the saddest brown pants,
 a long-handle spade extending your arms,
 eyes folded over reaching for noon.

Off behind you, faded to gray,
 jetted the rip of animate steam,
 coal gases; railroad track arrowing
 in a lake top that still does not exist.

You said, "*Mangia*," and laughed at me,
 your big teeth ripe of red meat and bread,
 voice as loud as your hands slapping with music.

You untied the red bandanna at your neck,
 a sun-bothered sail of red bandanna,
 wiped the brow under a felt hat, sucked
 at the papered bottle until I tasted iodine
 at the bend of my throat, smelled coal dust
 coming a talc over us, like a dry fog.

It was the same yesterday when I made
 a v-grooved pole to hold the clothesline up,
 and over the fence a visitor from the Maritimes
 said, "You go back a long way. I haven't seen
 a pole like that in years and years."

So I guess you came the way the pole did,
 out of the roads I've traveled, down lanes
 stuffed like chairs, past yard geographies,
 a long view over trees, out of some
 thing I was, an organic of memory,
 celluloid flashing of wide spaces
 I passed through, the odors I thought
 I wore or was, cannons at the edge
 of a distant war, colors banging
 their permanence tightly against
 the back of my eyes,

pieces of the circle I find myself on,
 where you were a moment ago, just
 out the window of my mind, bearing
 the riddle of a melancholy whistle.

* * * * *

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Part Nine

I asked Tiny Dame Time to explain herself tonight, for I'd taken myself by miles back through the years, just to see. Did she cackle? Oh, I'm not sure.

Then she demonstrated: moved stately before my eyes, then blinked my eyes & caused a loop, cackled, definitely cackled this time, slowed down, speeded up, multiplied same event in strange new guises, cackled wildly in echoes through my mind & minds, then came to a kindly stop, having told me everything in a language best read in full moonlight in dreams—

Tiny Dame Time seemed a bit imp, a bit coyote for me but she did not yet quite abandon me, we traveled together, skittered to a wide wild field of weeds, & yes, this was a way I could work with, time as a wide wild field of weeds, passing, looping, speeding up, slowing down, multiplying in infinite strange guises—

Did this answer my question? I suppose not. But it's helped my forming a better one.

How do we most often measure time: by change, by memory—what comes to be, what isn't any longer—who we are like a music, a continuous changing hum, louder, softer, echoing, new—hum of the wide wild field of weeds—

Tiny Dame Time cackles, demonstrates again by crunching on a long stretch of autumn leaves, now a titter & stomps the snow, now splashes those spring rain puddles & slows to stop to *hmmmmmm*—

A *hmmm* but she looks up, looks around, *o curious thing this world is!* looks around & begins to shake her hips, dance around some, jump, jump, jump again & onto a friendly air current, perhaps a friend, carries her along, *flutter flutter!* carries her along her way not a way, her path not a path & I come along too, though I don't know how, I am carried along too & this occurs more & less often over the years, Tiny Dame Time would come small & smaller & sometimes so very tall, cackle, loop, mutiply, crunch! stomp! splash! *flutter flutter flutter* when did these adventures with Tiny Dame Time cease? Did I forget them or reject them?

Things change over time. Me. I changed. Day by day. Hour by hour. I'm not telling it very well. It gets better. This is how I felt at the worst of it. But there's so much more.

i.

Tonight I listen for the flutter to go. Less than a hum, a low whistle, less than a something, a key-shaped declivity in the ether. Humbling clue.

"Wake up," a soft voice. Do I know it?

"It's OK. You're always like this. I don't mind you sleeping here. But look how you're positioned!"

"Oh."

"How's your neck?"

"It's OK."

He smiles. "Liar."

I shift around in the old green-cushioned chair. He offers a hand & I stand up.

"Man. Why do I get so groggy?"

He smiles. "You're doing hard work. Not everyone could handle it."

I nod. I know he admires me, & I've told him pretty much everything I know about it. I shouldn't but someone back there said it would be necessary to keep sane.

"You're going to need a friend. You can have one." How old was the Architect? I didn't know. I did know he liked me in his own gloomy, distracted way, & I was trusted by him unusually.

"How will I know?"

"You won't for sure. But every morning, look in a mirror at your face, study it closely. You'll probably meet someone who has that expression."

"Will it be one of us?"

"No. Not from here & now. But, yes, one of us in other ways. Someone you can trust. Someone who will understand. Someone who knows what's at stake."

So you are, my friend, the one I'm allowed. We met the first night, in that homeless camp under the bridge. I didn't know you were just visiting friends there, that you didn't live there anymore.

I'd come because the Hum had been detected. I was given a time & a place, both rough guesses, drunk my juice, & crawled into my Dreaming Tube. And that's where I landed. A homeless camp outside an American city. Back when there were living cities.

I was dressed warmly because luckily it was cold. I looked young but not dangerously so, bearded, a bit shaggy, a bit tall. I wore eyeglasses. Our clothiers would stress every detail. We had to fit in, but make an impression, but not too much. It was one of humanity's last arts.

Men stood around the fire barrels warming faces & hands, sharing bottles. I stood among them. Offered a bottle, I smiled it off. Mouthed a taught response. "AA." The man nods, grasps my eyes with his a moment.

I think you knew almost right away I didn't belong somehow. You stood next to me & nodded. Began to talk softly. There was no lie about you.

"They're good people here, mostly. They don't ask questions & they keep an eye on each other. They can spot a problem pretty quickly."

"I'm not—"

He laughs. "No, not you. I'm just telling you."

I nod. Remember the Architect's words. I haven't been sent this far for a long mission before.

He pulls out a baggie of something. "These help." Puts a few dried pieces of something in my

hand.

I sniff. Mushrooms. They smell wonderful. I think.

He nods at me. Smiles. Chews a few.

I don't know but do also. He hands me a bottle of water. I drink.

I have more control over these kinds of experiences since I am here from across the Dreaming.

I could will them have little effect on me. I don't. I let it happen.

He walks around the camp, seems to know them all. Seems to be influential. I don't understand it all, but feel nothing but good in this strange place. Nothing like this where I come from.

At some late hour he faces me, grasps my shoulder. "I'd like you to stay where I stay tonight. We can talk. You'll be safe. If you don't want to, we'll find a safe place for you one way or another."

Words have begun to elude me, to dance & sing. To cackle & crunch. *Ah*. I nod.

With many goodbyes we leave the camp & walk over a bridge through late night city streets. Building after building. Then a massive one, a long city block, but only a single red door. No sign. I'm swaying in mind as he unlocks it with a key. Oh yes, there is a sign. "Arcadia Bookstore & Cafe. Please use front entrance." We step in, Dylan goes for a light.

His name is Dylan. He told me that at some point. He takes my hand since I am still in the doorway. Pushes the door shut behind me. It seems to melt into the wall as though not really there. I'm not sure how to believe my eyes.

Feeling a little shaky, I say, "You live in a bookstore?"

He laughs, a sound that quite reassures me. "It's a big place. The bookstore's only part of it. I'll find you some space, I promise."

He's got what seems like a firelamp to lead us. There's no sense to the sizes of the rooms we pass through: big, small, long, brief. High-ceiling, very low.

Now we're walking up a ramp, ramp after ramp, then a long hallway with a rug I could lose myself in right now, dancing & cackling & splashing in my mind, & Dylan is leading me into a small room with a big bed, a small table, a tall window. Candles & a blue vase of water on the bedside. An old radio—

Blankets & pillows. Dylan sits at the desk's chair but motions me to get comfortable in bed.

I sit. Peer at him in the candles-soft darkness. "Do you know who or what I am?"

Shakes his head. "Not exactly."

I want to tell him. I've chosen my friend. But I don't say anything.

"They want your attention for awhile."

"Who?"

"The mushrooms."

I feel a little panic. "Don't worry. I'll be here. Go with them."



Wow. OK. I go.

It was another dream of sand set me to go. This one a test, the several questions, fingering grains to conjure answer, & in the right order: Forgive. Understand. Reconcile.

And now the path, past my dreams, & every foolish hour. Came where I should, in this graying dusk, & now to listen, now to watch, wait & watch, *there*—

A pink nose, glowing fur, parting through grass, a way not a way, just the flutter to go—
flutter to go

Why show me all this? Why lead me into my known memories? I know where this led—how it came back to me—

ii.

I arrived here, to you, Dylan, from so many hours & miles. I remember hard two.

Your greasy brow, your sweaty face, playing a game you love, but maybe not enough, you let it kill you. I know, Dylan, that sounds off, but in my time the game was how men measured in matters of life, not just sport.

You wanted to sing, shape the air to your music, but there were no more mediocre or amateur players. You wanted to color exposed the cankers in your heart, if not fill or efface them all. It was personal with you, as the game in some way was not personal enough.

I was a sideline reporter but I wasn't just rooting out injuries & strategies. I was sniffing for weakness of intention, a holding back of heart's all. There was no choice; everything contributed toward forestalling the coming collapse.

We collided, you stumbled & hit me, stood up, saw my insignia, panicked & fell into me again. I helped you from the field, to try & calm you. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Years later, we are talking on the telephone. Wired up to the wall, Dylan, just like the old days. The atmosphere became wrong for wireless transmission. For a lot of things. We're talking, trying to understand the moment when that game's mud between us became dust. We're trying to understand anything at all. Like all medics, you are kept apart from the population, preserving your knowledge as long as possible. Keeping you alive, in service of some.

I'm calling from a phone booth in an old coffeehouse in San Francisco. Several floors, rooms doored by old patchwork curtains, a couch the color of badly dyed red hair, thin covers-less books of poetry heaped together between bricks.

The irony is that my wife is in there with you. And yours is out here with me. We made a deal. It worked out on your end. I haven't seen or slept with your wife in two years the time of our last call.

Sleeping alone gives a man a lot of time to think. The room dark, I think of women I saw that day. Strip them & re-dress them in my mind. When I come it's rarely good. Nothing

I'd trouble a real girl with.

The dreams come back & there is Tiny Dame Time. I don't know that's her name. Could be anything really.

What's odd is that I'm not small anymore, & yet she sees me & we are in this place I remember, with the winding corridors, gray skies overhead. Walls made of vines & stones.

She skitters off with her cackling & strange noises, & I follow. After many dreams like this, we arrive somewhere almost of a sudden, like she's decided.

A Fountain, very tall, very old, I admire it. Wonder how it contributes against the final collapse.

A cackle, a skitter, & further along a sort of exit. A Gate. Seems hundreds of feet high. I walk through it, & back in, checking. Back out & I notice the legend "*For Those Lost*" written at its center, its highest point.

I can't find your wife & she's why I'd come to this point. I'm pulled back at this point, it can't be continued, this mission.

"If anyone can find her, you can," you said on the phone.

"Yah," I said. Wondering if the come in you came out in righteous spurts, if she sucked it with her lips & thighs both.

Silence on the line. "You're a good friend. I wish something else for you." Who said that to who?

Dylan, the mind survives a lot by suppression, by stubbornness, before it starts to go—

What I can't quite picture is where I really begin.

iii.

I don't come out of this room for a long time, & Dylan lets me be. He's made clear there's food & drink & safety for me, but allows me readiness in my own time to ask.

The black kitten, so tiny in her long blue top hat, sleeps on a scrap of cardboard I found, or sometimes on the edge of my hand. We cannot decide if she is my dream, either of us, but she remains close in my hours.

I sit at the table looking out the tall window. I seem to have an elongated view that runs: trees, mountains, the sea, full moon above the sea. How?

I'm trying to understand what any of this is, as I always have tried to understand. I saw clouds in the skies, when a child, as frames to mysteries embedded in the blue. Yet I remember me only so young.

The ways lamps reflected on windows, my first heartbreak, I watched & watched. My next heartbreak seemed to show a secret, warm pattern to things, in each girl's smiling kiss, loving kiss, desperate kiss, last kiss. The way a girl smells as you kiss her brow & leave her a last time. Enough. *Go.*

Faces in crowds befuddled me, each one seeming dry & no hint of the tinder within. Perhaps something when on a train wrapped in a book, or a letter. I found myself watching lamps deeper into reflection, listened. She would sleep gentle in my bed, she after she, gentle as demised. But it was never my bed, & I could never stay.

Then the black kitten came, then the blue top hat.

Or the other way. I travelled the last rail out of town, found an empty ballpark. A scrap of cardboard, like this one I hold now. Or the edge of my hand. The tiny black kitten sleeps without answer, or question. A trust in me. I step from the ground, finally, balancing her as my all.

iv.

Wake. Look around. Fuck. Something. Push the table out of the way & sit on the floor looking out toward woods, mountains, sea, moon. Full moon. You smile at me, Tiny Dame Time, *ahh*.

You nudge around in my mind, tending this, touching that. I let you, I'm your black kitten, whether this makes sense or not.

Tap, tap, tug. Ah. Ahh. That one.

One of the first, I think. You uncurl it long & still heavy in me to have a look. I lay out now, hand on my dubious cock, & remember.

The last time I saw you, the last time we curled half-nude, watching TV, you relaxed, smiled with me. You had translucent shades on your windows, to let the stars & streetlights in, but obscurely (I love you) I was not your lover.

We formed a circle, you & me & him, we tendered each other (I love you), I was not your lover, nor his, we were sugar water on each other's tongues, colluding flames in each other's hearts.

I joined you, & you, I stayed, & then remained, & then no more. I'd watch his cock enter you, hold each of your hands, listen to pulse, breathing, what couldn't I know? What couldn't I have? It was just training, I was told. My body felt smashed by granite when retrieved. I was tended. I was praised.

Now here, I think, I find my cock is bone-hard & I am pulling on it hard & painful, I cry out & spurt & again & more. The window is splattered. I struggle to wonder what dream semen against a past-time's window is, *truly fucking is*—

Stand & look through the splattered window. I see light on water among the trees. Those mountains are always snow-capped so I cannot deduce the season from them. The trees are evergreens, also tell me nothing.

I am a man, some kind of a man, & I yearn to know the season, know the rest. I am a man & knowing is a hole I try to fill. I am a man & miss you for all your cruelties, your final

lies, your lingering tenderness.

“Why do you watch?” you whispered one night near the end, breathing hard, moaning, but your eyes on me all the while.

I was not your lover (I love you) (just training) that last long night when we all twisted into bed, when we made each other come new stars into the hours & skies. I was not your lover when the juices (I love you) of our bodies commingled & no god could tell us apart. I was not your lover but I am a man & I am still trying to fill that hole, see through your translucent shades into your heart, hearts, three, two, one, & I am awake. Really gone. You’re gone.

It’s time to see Dylan.

υ.

He brings me to a private room. Red lit but murky, we sit in two armchairs. I try to guess his age. He is but isn’t a fairly young man.

We drinks some kind of tea. He is quiet, but kind, waiting my words when they come. I shake my mind.

He suddenly laughs. “She’ll still be in there.”

I nod. He knows.

“You’ve got one too.”

“I couldn’t tell you where or when she is,” he says softly, “But every once in awhile I feel the warm hook move around in my heart.” Sits back. Now he’s waiting.

I close my eyes, & begin. “It came upon me with no name & it is beautiful & I can’t describe it but I’ll try.

“There were streets then, closer to the water, the salt & water. The glare of trollies. Fires. I was mad, several times over. I walked & walked.

“It came upon me with a beautiful push to say, to sing, I can only think of hands. So many hands, come & gone. Watched & come & gone.

“Parks full of scrawny green, the moon a thumb’s print above. I walk & I walk.”

Open my eyes. Look straight in him, “Her ass poised before me. Her eyes, fuzzy with want & challenge. Like a good fuck could clear out her heart’s trash.” He leans forward, puts his hand on mine.

“Did you fuck her, Dylan?”

Pause. “Not exactly.”

“That’s worse.”

“I know.”

I close my eyes again. The trollies pass in pairs by the open window, one hither, the other yon. I laugh. I should have laughed. “The beautiful thing, nameless, nods with me.”

I enter you from behind and you bite on my hand. Always hurts more than you remember. Always tighter. I hold off coming for a long time, you moan, you cry. When I do, it’s very quick, a big one quick.

We sit together under your window. Its view to bricks imprinted red & gold. Calmer in body. Our hands twined.

“Your ankles.” They’re discolored.
 You move back from me. “My shoes.”
 But the beautiful thing is nudging me again, pulling me, I have to hurry.
 I kiss your bare shoulder & stand.
 You look everywhere else. I walk & I walk. You left. You were always the medic’s wife. No matter how much you loved me.

“The beautiful thing is still in me,” I say to Dylan, now, unsure how much I’ve been saying aloud. “I feel like I came back to her, I rolled her over, I fucked her straight on, made her *come for me with her eyes to mine*. I feel it all the time.” I put his hand on my chest. “It’s there. Music. *It never quits.*”

vi.

We’re quiet for awhile. I see pain in his eyes, just listening.
 “She’s still yours.”
 “Yes. But.”
 “But?”
 “I don’t know *where* she is. I don’t know *when* she is. I don’t think I know *what* she is.”
 He quiets. Waiting for me again.
 I try again. “Even near the end there were ordinary days. Places. People. It was like adjust & adjust & adjust. Keep the end away awhile more.

“I lived in a university town, it was still going, we had militias to keep people out. You had to be there because you were native or qualified. Knowledge, history were guarded like they could fucking help.

“I wasn’t anyone but a local & I liked books. I kept around not knowing what to do. The cafes were full of old men playing chess. Playing it like it was how they wanted to go out. I write a little, nothing I’d show, just notes on how the days are, what I see people do.

“One night there was a preacher, I don’t know how he got to the cafes. One of those powerful old men in dust & long beard. He lunged at me, sitting in a corner of the cafe courtyard with my little book. ‘Your world’s mud’s becoming dust! Behold it everywhere! Your world’s mud is becoming dust!’”

I stop. I cough. *Fuck this.* Dylan grabs my shoulder. Squeezes tight. I let him. I absorb something from him, from this telling.

“He went away. I don’t know if they took him or he shattered to dust. But I got up & walked. There was a park. It was small, surrounded on all sides by these old, old buildings. The park was still green, though, & I tried to kneel, to believe in it. I tried to stay there.

“I found a scrap of cardboard on a bench there. Putting it in my pocket, I felt a flutter in my chest. I think of it as the flutter to go. A warning. Time to leave.



"So I walked across the heavily guarded bridge, walked & walked, for miles & miles, I didn't sleep, I didn't eat, I just walked. I eventually came to the desert. Some desert. There were people out there. There were great fires at night & I walked into one. Just to see."

I look at Dylan who's waiting.

"A man of dreams does not burn. I tried to. *I couldn't burn.*"

"So you didn't."

"No. I didn't"

"You went back to the courtyard. You met the woman. The medic."

"I met many women before her."

"But eventually."

vii.

You came to me. I was in the courtyard & you came to me. You were out of place there, with your tea & your newspaper.

"They started up again. The Internet was militarized for a few years & then it was destroyed."

I nod you over with a smile. "I'm new here."

"Professor?"

"Sort of."

It doesn't matter really. You're young & pretty & we take to each other easily. I think it's why I'm kept around.

"There's more to it."

What mattered was that when I undressed you, your eyes smiling growled. The time we fucked on the bench next to the militia headquarters. I made you leave your comey pink panties when we left. What mattered what how I would chew your breasts & nipples, your ass, your clitoris, I would find dirtier avenues into your body & pour through them, clean them, purge you of these end-times, purge you clean, & we were barely wed before you had to go, had to leave me, but we had fucked all over that town, I possessed you for when you left, I knew you had medical skills, I knew you'd go & fuck if I could have stopped it, I could have, I could have, I didn't.

"Did you want to?"

"What I wanted didn't matter."

"Why?"

"Because I'd found my coat, my traveling coat. My hekk, the dream stick I carry."

He's looking at me odd. "I don't understand."

"I was there following the Hum. The problem with long missions is that you acclimate. You know you're different, you dream different, but somehow things settle back, explain enough."

"You forget you're dreaming?"

"It gets tricky. Because nobody around you knows. You're real to them. But your behavior gets herky-jerky, like I'm telling you. Like a ship hitting a bad stretch. But you don't steady." I nod to myself. "But then I find the jacket, like it was programmed. The hekk stick."

I look around. Nothing but night here. I nod.

"I'm still there. Still in the courtyard. Still the old chess players, clicking of pieces. Still women too, students, professors, smiling, still arriving with permissions. *I still feel the lust*, in my coat, stick nearby.

"The old men talk of multiple realities, of how this is not the end. I listen. I know different, but I listen."

"Weren't these the end-times?"

"No. I wasn't sent far back. I think it was training but I don't know."

Dylan nods. I don't make sense to him but still he listens to me, like I listened to those old men.

"One night there was a guitar, hadn't been in so long. Just started up from the street. I looked & looked, saw a big man with a guitar, playing for all he was worth, like it mattered, *like it most mattered*.

"I am a man of dreams. I know this. But the music was a signal, a nudge, I closed my eyes & reached out to it, over the fence of details & into the music." I pause. Stand. Dylan starts to as well, then lets me.

"Cool darkness, flowing, floating, water the temperature of skin. A bare shoulder in a cluster of glares. A reedy voice. To find her again, to remember everything, but The Dreaming pulls me back, pulls me over, retreats me from the far edges, I wake. A bare shoulder. Whose? I am a man of dreams. *I do not burn*."

I fall into Dylan's arms & I guess pass out for awhile. He holds me all.

viii.

"There was a situation."

Dylan nods. He's brought me to an open area, a green place on a roof, I think. Is it autumn? The air feels cool & smells nice, like memories.

"I was sent to a place to heal. The people there listened to me, closely, fed me pieces of fruit, much water. They would let me roam a great big garden by myself, hours & hours, & sometimes I would see a striped white tiger with electric blue eyes. Only him, nobody else. I should have been terrified of such a beast but I wasn't. His look was kind, concerned. We let each other nearer & eventually embraced & walked together. He . . . tendered me. That's what someone called him." I sigh but not sadly.

"But one night they dress me. It's my time to go, continue my healing, & travel on. It's the next stage."

"The club I am sent to is dark & the music growls from a fractured stage. I count ten lights upon it & nothing clearly in view. It's wrong, but maybe others notice too."

Dylan raises his hand. "Were you dreaming? This club?"

I think. "Yes, I suppose so. But these were others of my kind. So they knew my truth."

"And the White Tiger?"
I shake my head. I don't know.

I stand & look at the girl sitting with me, her red hair, electric blue eyes. She dresses in feathers & leaves. She has a crown of vines & stones. I steady, hopeful, helpless too.

She smiles toward something & points. She says, "It's a language of metaphors & displacement."
I nod.

We continue to stare at each other. Her shoulder soft in lights, her cheek softer in shadows.

Words come on me, I speak. "A person is a house of rooms. And we go from one room to the next, clearing the cobwebs, but then the rooms we're not in fill up with more & more, & we keep moving."

I am shaking, this matters.

I grasp her shoulder, grip it, pull her up standing to me. "*A chair is like a stump.*"

Shake my head, Dylan is holding me again. Autumn leaves. Smells of memory. I nod. He lets.

"We traveled together. Maybe that was the intention. Heal me up some with the White Tiger, then send me along with a new girl.

"At night she is like warm water, I float in her darkness. There is music tugging me, that big man & his guitar. I follow."

Your touch is moonlight in deep woods, a push, a pull, a tremble to press me on in these obscure matters. You were young too, committed. Sleepers gave up everything in joining. No ties, no going back. So you hadn't been loved much back there, & I didn't think you had my experiences beyond the Dreaming either. You loved me like we had choice we could make about our lives.

ix.

I spend more time in the bookstore itself, its many floors of endless shelves. Knowing how it ends, or probably will end, & something about how it began too, it leads me away from some books, toward others.

Dylan lets me approach him, as I will, as I do. My story isn't fully told him. His isn't told me either but he may not be so needful for telling.

"We traveled to a far Western city. One I'd been to before, the coffeehouse I'd called my friend from. It was still there, strangely.

"I hadn't checked till this particular night. That morning I'd read a sad letter & it had sent me along my day's path.

"It was a letter warning you of me, wondering at all the years you'd been with me. Urging to return, to let me go, to come back & accept what was to come, stop fighting the inevitable. He didn't believe you'd come back, knew you believed, you loved me, & you believed in our work."

I'd left you sleeping, your face peaceful, your ever-light sleep mercifully unbroken.

"Walked far to find my friends in their paintless old church, its many rooms a refuge. I meet quite a few of us there. The Hum runs through the city strong.

"Looking further, I found them in the cemetery with its clusters of embedded stone markers. They were ours."

"How?"

"How?"

"They were Sleepers but they'd died beyond the Dreaming & were buried there?"

"You mean their bodies in the Sleeping Capsules?"

Nod.

"Sometimes there, sometimes not."

He hardly nods.

"There were always others around when they held these remembrances. Poor, crazies, a few ex-priests."

I returned to you in the icy rain. The dusk is wildly colored, sheets of light on the horizon, ripping & mending, & I felt the leaving in me, that sad letter, letting you go, it wasn't fair, any of it.

"I willed myself go. Losing ground, solidity, some city street as cars passed in the street & people in both directions on the sidewalk, losing solid ground, I had my coat on, my hekk in hand, I was going now, days & miles falling away, & I understood, I think, that nobody there knew what would save us, *knew anything*—that I had to find my way myself, whatever this meant, I would not return, maybe at all, I would choose myself, choose & choose again."

Dylan helps me to my room, to my bed. He gets in with me. For a moment I think . . . but no. The warm hook in his heart is shaped like a very particular girl. But he holds me closely. This matters very much to him. We doze like this, entwined as loving brothers, & I take him a little way in, to see the rest of the story so far.

x.

There were birds, there were birds, there were birds, & at first they were out my window & they were filling my dreams so they were out my window but filling my dreams too.

They crossed over, with their singing, their chuckling, crossed over until eventually they formed my dreams, bigger & bigger, their singing became my dreams, my dreams became their singing, more & more, & still they were out my window singing.

You remained. You slept more & more. You slept deeper into your covers, your pillow. You were no longer there by sun, by day. You were leaving with the birds.

You were now neither by sun nor moon but you were some strange remain. Close to me still, somehow, I'd gone, really gone, but you were close to me still, a shadowy sticky something now, the first sweetness life will take & leave only open hands to remind.

I wake. Dylan is with me still. Asleep. Really asleep. I find myself not moving from his presence. Not leaving this place which may be safe for me for awhile.

I feel all of you still. And I don't know what exactly I've got here. Maybe they can still inject me with the right cocktail & I'll be snapping awake with a roar of defeat any moment now.

But I wonder if that is what the Architect intended. Were we even meant to save the world with our strange efforts?

I'm not convinced that there are not other forces, *stranger strengths*, deep in this too. *On our side.*

xi.

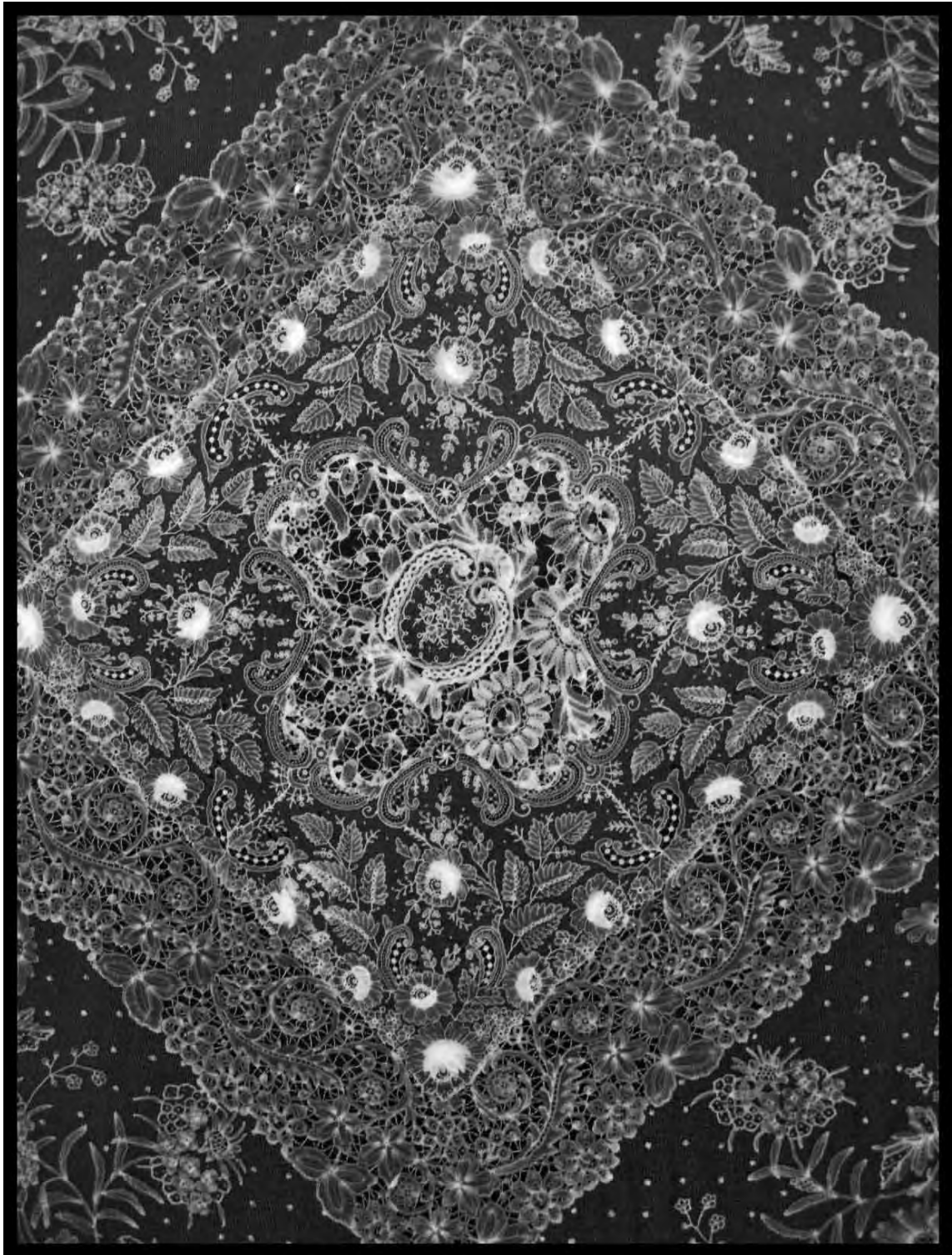
[When you were sent, there were two of you. In case one didn't make it. Made of the best, most precious, organic material remaining, but packaged for deep space travel; you were unassembled, but bearing coordinates to follow, & instructions when certain conditions were met.

[The first was rich ocean water, the true god of the blue-green planet, its generator of all its life forms, aquatic, land, air alike. As you burned through the atmosphere, you lost all but your last protective shells, all burned away in the prayer you would hit water not land, ocean water, & you did. You hit the ocean like twin speeding missiles & shot miles below before slowed up—

[The ocean began your process, activated each of you, though still in stasis, you were begun & part of that beginning was compelling a slow ascent to the air from however deep you were. Still completely protected within, that last layer around you, in essence, slowly inflated, & you rose & you rose—

[Then you burst through the surface & the last stage, oxygen, completed it. Your bodies formed fully, you heaved for air & frantically waved your arms to swim, & only if the sea provided boats would you live, if only—how long can small bodies swim in open seas?

[But on this blue-green planet you were lucky, & there were boats & men, the kind who freely



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New York, New York

fish the seas but own their living still to powerful men on land. They'd been told to look out for you, by way of reward & threat—

[But these men had only been told of one, it had been made clear. And you were both obviously powerful magic. So—one of you promised to the King though his reward meager compared to what the Travelers would give for the other—*oh what fine rewards they would give*—& the care you would receive—

[You too would find your way to the Castle where your companion was brought today—much forgotten, much changed—

[You were become one of the Travelers of the world, moving groups who do not stick the world with fences & maps; you were raised to possess little but your body, your wits, the people & animals you traveled with—

[You were treated as one touched singly, special, though not told why, not until later. As a child, you were expected more of, you grew to lead those around you, learned twice as fast & then teach all you could. You excelled in this, in reading the patterns & flows of landscape & men alike. Your group prospered—& slowed its travels.

[You considered. There were some who would be willing to stop altogether. Live more as, if still apart from, other men. Young as you were, your opinion mattered. The ones your age & younger looked to you more as their leader than the older ones. These older ones let you into their counsels as a simple survival move.

[But there were things you had not told. Dreams of a girl, a beautiful girl whose face you could never quite see, nightly dreams of her as she grew up somewhere far, an Island, a Castle, the beloved daughter of a King, you would be near her in your many dreams, even as she traveled her own dreams, following her into the hole in her bedroom wall, to the caverns underneath the Tangled Gate where the Creatures lived—but you did not know these words—you just followed & watched——

[The desire you felt for this girl deepened as the years. Boys, even men, among the Travelers smiled at you, sometimes shyly approached—but you strangely felt nothing, not a lack of desire but one so eclipsed by the girl in your dreams that to lay with any of them would be a cruel lie.

[There were old women among the Travelers, wise, seers, some intimate with plant medicine & healing, some with the enigmatic language of the stars. One among them listened to dreams, rarely, but was said to have priceless insight.

[Looking back, had you not waited, the slaughter would have occurred anyway. Your group had strayed into disputed lands, & lingered, as though another claimant. But you might not have been restless awake all night, nor seen the mass of them riding up that hill you would climb on your sleepless or uncertain nights. You might have been slaughtered like the men or

taken like the girls & women, had you not visited the dream seer earlier that night—

[She listened to what you told, what you had never told anyone before. The caverns, the Creatures, the Castle, the King. The mysterious man in the Tower. How you felt her wishes, her desires, her uncertainties—

[The seer listened & said: “She is your Other. Your right path leads to her, to you possessing each other somehow, & then away by your will.”

[But how? You asked. Blushing. She is not a man. Nor I. We cannot possess each other in the familiar ways.

[She grasps your face close to hers. “You were rent from each other long ago. She is your true path for now.” Then her bony heated hand roamed beneath your clothes, pressing your breasts, leaning further in, under your garments as your legs compelled to open & spread, a finger inside your deepest tightness, in & in & in, eyes closed, moaning pleasure & pain until suddenly a wild black shivering release, & the words: “anyone can press the trigger & fire but who knows which way the heart eludes?”

[They came in such black masses. Silently at first, then their blood terrors came upon them. Still damp, still very riled in body from the old woman’s practiced touch, you knew few men in that mass would care if your cry was pleasure or pain, you ran. Ran far across fields, over hills, far far into woods where you should have felt scared, a barefoot girl with empty hands. But not this woods. Not you. From that first night on, you survived, found in the world around you what was needed. Even when painful, the world spent as you needed.]

I leave the Tramp & continue on my way. We traveled long & long together. He was a man with so many skills I refused to call him by any man’s single name.

But he is very old & when he walks, he *tramps hard* on the ground. Like his steps are drawn back harder to the earth than most.

I could not get him to lay with me, to teach me what I needed to know, for a very long time. He had shed the years of wanting women & little wished them again. His desires were songs of wonders of the world, how beauteous, how brutal.

When I threatened to pay a man & bring him to my tent, he relented.

His touch neither rough nor gentle, he simply undid my clothes, & then with great care, the rest of me. He tended me from a seed to a bloom, a burst of sunshine in my many moans & cries, & when he came into me, I saw we would be parting for now, that my path was far in miles & years; I had to put world upon world upon my mind & body to get where I wanted to go—

“To the Island”

"Yes, yes," his accent heavy when annoyed.

"To find her. My right path."

"So you were told" he sighs.

"Yes!" I flash hard at him.

You set me on my way by penetrating me deeper than I knew was possible. When I came, I was gone. And then I was elsewhere.

I miss you. It's weakness & I assume it will not last, but I miss you. You were a great talker & though a lot of it was nonsense, pieces of your travels & strange beliefs knotted up to explain the world in ways that would only make sense to you, not all of it was.

"The ships have always been overhead." You'd say this often when we'd camp beneath the stars. You had a special tea you'd drink on these nights, I refused it by its putrid smell, but you'd just laugh every time, wink your green or blue eye at me, sometimes both in turn, sip, talk on. You liked your roaring fires on these nights. I'd listen for hours, doze, wake up, you'd still be talking.

"But not just overhead. For you see" & you'd pause for effect, as though telling the first time, not the thousandth—"we are on those ships, as we walk around, down here. We are on those ships overhead." I'd listen. Once, he talked on. "And you, young Princess Missy"—a nickname I loathed but for loving him—"You especially." I should have asked more. But I was scared. The old woman that last night at home had given me more than enough. I wish I had asked.

I remember & wonder over all this as your hand half-asleep roams me, trembling for another tussle. I let it miss, miss again, slide away into sleep. You don't want me *that* much.

It could have been you or either of the other two, in truth. I just needed one of you to keep me until this rolling restaurant reaches its next city. That's the thing about the Tramp. Men sniffed me still, but he was a buffer to their approach. When I left him, the protection was gone. Men now would approach with trained smiles & wet lips.

You were the youngest of the three, least likely to hit or gag, easiest to please with a few licks & a slow smile.

The restaurant has rooms in the back, a few to rent, & I need your wallet too. Our room is a bed, a chair, a table, a toilet behind an old curtain. A black & white TV on the table. When you're out, I use your coins to watch the TV, smoke your cigarettes. You'd been with untrained girls until now, as enamored of their own pretty faces & slender bodies as they were ignorant how to use them, how to give or receive pleasure. You'd keep me if you could.

I watch a film about a woman captured & brought to a cell. She recollects her youth & friends but, strange, they seem like just boys she saw on TV. She sits nude among them, a thin silver crown on her head, they hold her gently & precious, smile & smile. I'm asleep when you return.

You stir. I consider. I'm from those ships overhead, the Tramp said, me, young Princess Missy. Would you still be fucking me if you knew this?

Now I'm sitting on the parapet outside our room, watching dark flat lands roll by, looking up

at the murky night sky. Hours? Missing gaps of time & intent. There, light on the horizon, a thin smear of pink & yellow.

Did you really look down my body in your bleary, gleeful rush that first night? I'd sat alone near your table of three. You'd all come from a job, onto the next, co-workers, not friends. Just traveling. Drinking hard. The other two were. You caught my eye & slowed way down. The others had already considered, each in a glance stripping me, calculating the time & effort & chance of getting my bare ass high in one of those back rooms. Not good, I would have advised. Drunken cock in the ass is a slow, sloppy, unpleasant thing.

No, you slowed. Another glance & you smiled. *O, what a smile.* Pretty as those girls you'd had till now, pretty as theirs. I tempted. I had no choice. No money. Tired. This rolling restaurant filled with men who wouldn't compliment me with the purchase of a room. A knife, a shadow, a low command to suck it all down.

Your friends were loud, tiring. You'd not touched your glass in awhile. We finally talked on the back deck, watching what was going & gone.

Words? Something about a cigarette. The chilly wind. The pretty girls would encourage you with a smile, a curious question, a touch to their hair. I let you struggle until I leaned close & whispered, "Is it good & hard for me yet?" You almost fled, but *then* I smiled, I laughed. "Get us a room."

I finish my cigarette, return to our room. Still thinking about the pretty girls, I undress & consider my body. A few men since the Tramp. They usually like my tits, small but firm. Tummy flat, decent legs.

You're lying splayed out, where I left you, easy to lick up hard & mount smoothly. You groan awake, wanting, groggy from what I've been putting in your drink. An insurance that you don't get to full strength in these tussles.

You're another of my practice runs but I really don't need much anymore. The prick isn't profound learning. Its brain, its heart, a little more. But learn the prick & the rest reveals easier. The Tramp would laugh. Maybe nod.

I ride you, squeeze you, hurt you a little, you squeal pleasure. It's our last night, I lay in your arms after, first & last time.

Morning. I've stayed in the city as that restaurant rolled through. Left you a kiss on your lovely chest, bloody kiss licked up from where I bit.

Now a stretch among men not as young or as pretty as you. Have to put a little more mileage on this body. Some bruising for my purpose. Like the Tramp, I bring you with me in a memory. Your eyes wide, spasming, again, & again. *Why your bed & not the other two?* Because they wouldn't have *thought to ask.*

xii.

Quiet months. Leave my room only at dawns, grow & gather at the local park to keep this body extant. Watching my black & white TV, I'd kept it. Snapped the chain & kept it. Sometimes I have to make a friend to get some coins to watch it. Once the coins go for a small sharp blade. Sometimes they want more than what's for sale. Or confuse me with the pretty girls.

It was peaceful except when the ones upstairs started coming through my window, as though it was their due, & taking things. I had almost nothing though the room had been furnished. But they would climb in & take things. I started visiting the one below me more & more. He never saw me as a pretty girl but he was kind to my plight.

I'd stay a few days, smoke his cigarettes, watch my TV, hope that film about the woman would come back on. I'd missed the beginning and end.

He'd come home at night from days spent hurting people in an office, fucking women with no last names at lunchtime. Living days that were all edges. He'd lay with me like a surrender. We'd give up sometimes & watch my TV. Better than upstairs.

But then he would visit his niece & smile after. Smile & bring her gifts & dance her around in the rain. All would fall away. All the edges. He was happy & that was good. Nothing for most in this world but to find someone or something to be happy with. What choice to this? Wasn't that what I was trying to do?

xiii.

The Tramp would talk about love once in awhile. I knew he'd been a handsome man & now he obscured this behind his grime & tatters. I could easily imagine many a woman loving his sonorous voice, his thoughts. His hands were gentle, moved with unconscious grace no matter the moment. I came to believe as the years went on that I had loved him in my own way & he'd released me for my benefit not his own.

"I guess you could say love will warp your path, one way or another," he began, it wasn't long after we met. He had assumed protection of me accidentally, thinking the man I was on my knees for behind the tavern meant to do more harm to me than sucking a drunken cock in a dirty alley did already.

He explained. "It was his clothes. The marks on his arms."

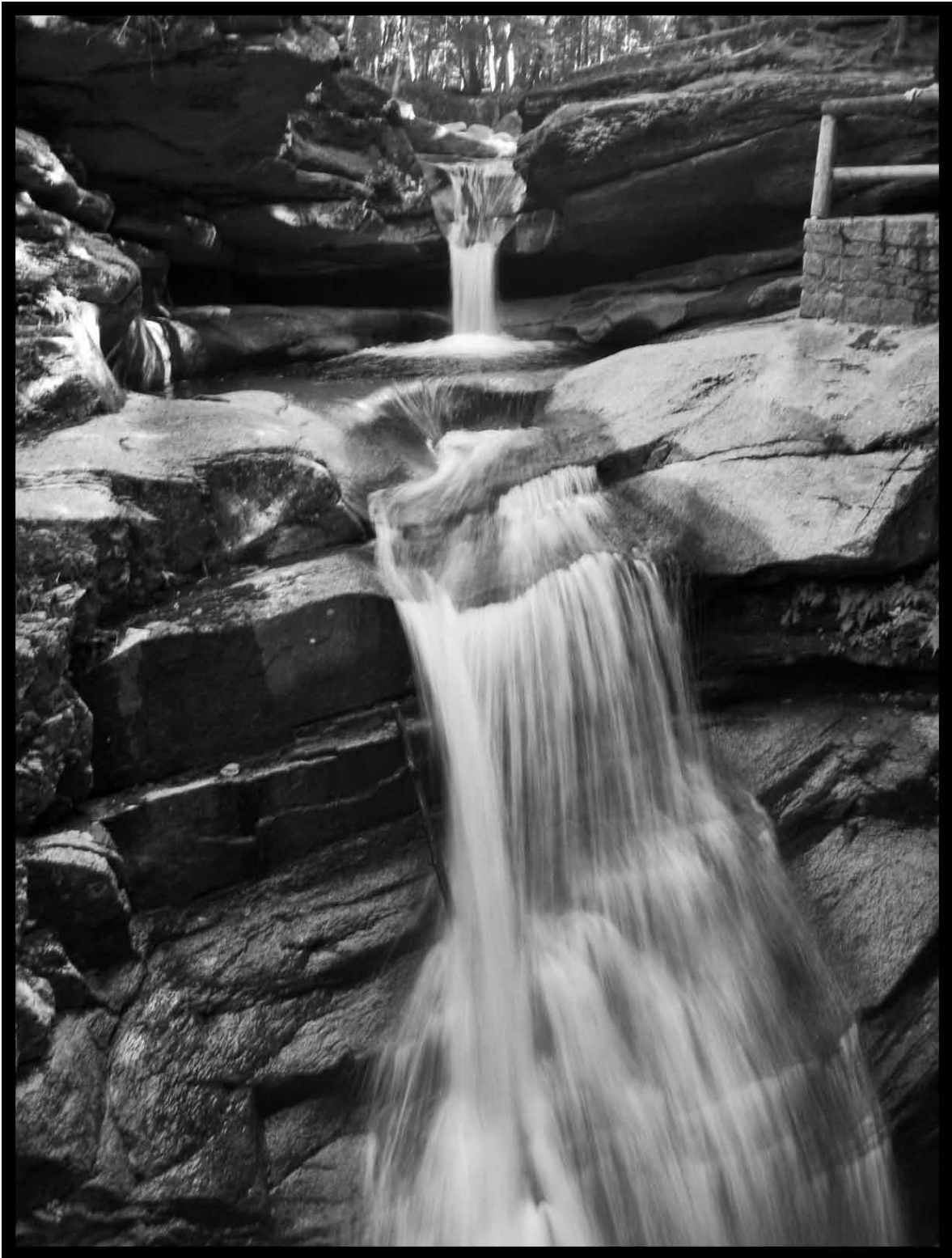
"I'm fucking fine! Next time you watch, you pay too."

He looked at me darkly, like never again. "You're not fine."

Took my knapsack lying near the moaning man's body, & walked on.

I was too furious to care what he'd likely saved me from. I had never traveled with anyone. I waited for his trousers to come down so I could get a much-needed bite in. But they didn't. I don't know why I stayed with him since the knapsack had little of value. He wasn't claiming me as a woman. There was no bind. We simply traveled together.

He continues. "So your best angle on the thing is to make sure you love as well as you possibly



can. Because your path will warp, one way or another. Nothing wrong to that. It's a good thing."

"Who have you loved?" I groused.
He laughed. "Who haven't I?"

Much later he took out from his great dirty overcoat a small handmade book held together & closed by a series of knots. There were pages & pages of drawings done in what seemed like charcoal, the lines etched into the paper as though by fingers, worked & worked.

Who hadn't he loved? There were many pictures of girls & women, each one distinct. Mostly faces, laughing eyes, sad mouths, ponytails, loose strands of hair, a scar, a dimple, freckles.

A couple of nudes, one slender, her mouth wide open as her fingers throttle between her thighs to orgasm. A bigger woman kneeling with a torso behind her, hands under her big breasts, yet not sex, no, embrace, her face is barely smiling, but beatific, joy, pure joy in this embrace. I looked for hours at those pictures, wished & feared my page would be there one far day.

Trees. All sorts of trees. Great monsters, rising to the stars in godly glory. Acorns. Crumpled leaves. One a burnt forest, stumps & shards from a great fire. I dream about that book still, when I'm lucky.

I think about it especially tonight as I've finished watching on TV a love story unfold.

The boy & girl are in a house with many floors. There's an elevator that runs from one floor to the next; no stairs it seems. They're trying to get together, to be close, it's not working. They end up always on different floors, again & again. I smoke & watch this tussle, is it years?

The seasons come & go, many of them, yet they never age. They never leave the house. At one point they find each other in the elevator, & for a moment they're close, happy, makes sense, things cohere. *And then something.* And then something else.

As I watch & smoke cigarettes, they're on different floors again. But it's different now. *Now they remember.*

The remembering is what changes things, because if they have, they will again. I watch as they near, one obstacle to the next, sometimes doubt, the worst obstacle of all. She becomes a whore. Him a priest. But it doesn't work.

Finally, many floors up, high, impossibly high, they find each other. There he is, there she is, they're together. She falls asleep in his arms. He sketches her face in a little book.

Wait. What? Maybe I dozed. It's a sweet story. It ends.

Then I notice something. Something that scares me. It's a window. I'm in my own room, as

rarely, & I've been looking out the window at the house over there. The curtains are closed now, but they weren't. What?

Maybe it was just dreams.

"Some warps in the path can be as beautiful as you can possibly imagine," The Tramp said once, or more, usually taking back his book from my unwilling hand. "But remember, young Princess Missy: it's all warps in the end." Little book back into the depths of his great coat.

xiv.

Were they dreams when I first watched you dance? Were they what draws me to you, even now, these dreams of you dancing? I think so but I don't know.

Others too would watch you dancing on the raked dancing grounds, how you'd make the sand & pebbles scatter. How you would lithe & blind move near the large rocks, roll over them, bend back to them, never a sound but the scrapes & scatterings.

You'd study books of patterns by evening with an older man, handsome, sad, loving you, & I would be so close, I could smell your virgin sweat, light & sweet, & his rough odor, & how many women had swooned in that in his years!

What were these dreams, prophecy? I was so deep in them, among the bushes & trees that moved with you, the secret fountain that would bubble & gush as you reached your crashing finish. The black stone shaped like a star with one point missing. The pink stone like a slouched or failing heart. Flowers no matter the seeming season.

They came more rarely, these dreams, as I took to my travels, with the Tramp & beyond. But just as fiercely & I would wake up panting for breath, crying, my limbs moaning me with pain. I just didn't know.

xv.

Wake up. No, *wake up*. In a warehouse, long steps, running. Shit, something, what? Light of day is gone. They control the situation beyond all reason, it's obvious. What am I here?

When they first came, it was as angels from God, His missionaries come to destroy the foul Earth, pass judgment on all. People *believed this. By the millions*. They submitted themselves to be judged & punished. It was that easy.

Wake up. No, *wake up*. It's a vast camp, strange, I keep moving. Feeling like something to be found, among these tents & trees & buildings. Something to help me *find you*.

I meet people wearing costumes promoting eternal life. It adheres to the body, sucks out the years & the toxins. *To wear this costume is to live forever*.

I keep walking. Wake up. No, *wake up*. I need to find a place to rest, to dream. Of you. Why to keep going.

You forget me sometimes. You forget I am coming to you. You dance for him, or the other one, & it's enough, it's full in you. I cry out.

This is not a hunger that I chose.

It consumes my path ever closer to you. *I won't wake up.*

xvi.

I keep moving, in mind or body or both. Long days, long nights. Am I still in that room & my friend nurses me? Am I dreaming in the Tramp's arms? Did I really escape that massacre when I was young? Just me?

I grind & thrash for something, not old sadnesses or furies or memories. Something now. Whatever has impelled me toward you, *give me something.*

When it comes, it cackles. It's a . . . tiny imp in many colors.

It cackles & leads me away, out a door, from a ditch, the grasp of two women & a man, I don't know. It's black & white, orange dress red trimmed, wide eyes, laughing mouth, a tiny thing I follow away from somewhere. This is play. Like my old friend & his niece.

I'm led away & I go, what else? What has gnashing my thighs for you got me? There is cackling. There is play. All is game, an illusion.

I go, & there are many trees. Pale, beneath the darker stars. The imp smooths my listen, learns me sniff twice, & again. Pay attention, both smaller & taller. The imp shows me there might be other friends, if I let. Let go, sniff, twice, let go.

I am thus content to exhale until the night my imp goes all white, still cackling but all colors gone.

The bite is in me again, *oh feel it*. Sand & stones scatter. *Feel it.*

I dream of you again, you are in the Tramp's book, page after page of you, you are crying out for me to come to you, fingers clawing in your thighs, *o fucking godd cum in me*

the imp all the while cackling my mind, her colors restored, wildly restored, her eyes wider, cackling high & low, hurry, me go. *Hurry, hurry*, cackling high & low, *hurry me go.*

xvii.

Then the worse part of it. I killed someone. I'm running & I have no chance. They know & are following. I remember it like a cloudy sky in my mind. *Who did I kill? Why?*

It's night. I'm in these strange woods, again. Pale with dark lights overhead. Over & over I find these woods & they protect me. The pursuers retreat, unwilling to follow me here. Do they think these woods will do me worse? What do I think this? Can I hear them talking?

I'm OK. Whatever this is, it can take me willing. I wait. It doesn't. So I try remembering.

My clothes are rags on me, I pull them off, tear them useless from me. The moon my light, I examine me. My hair is long on one side, shorn close on the other. When that? I'm thin, not starved but not an extra pound. My legs are strong. My breasts bruised, gnawed, sensitive. My pussy, bare, shaved, also tender. I'm not sick. What was it? I stare into the moon, hard into the moon, begging me tell, begging me remember.

There was a room, where it happened, small, a basement. My means gone, near starving, led by hands there, fed old bread, watery soup. A bed, my new workplace.

One man caused us to be bound together so tight I thought we'd die that way, watching each other's eyes go glassy. I shifted & squeezed my thighs till I found his pain threshold, then harder till he groaned, harder till he begged, harder till he screamed & was led away.

Another would save me when I wasn't there for saving. He told me excited he'd purchased me, & would bring me to his new house. Would dress me in ruffles & satin. Pink underwear. Would wash & brush my hair for hours. Study to know me by my every tick & pore, & know me nothing.

I couldn't. A part of me tempted, a weak part of me that longed to play deep into his mind over days or years until he would fuck me blind, call me whore, wash the blood off me after, feed me chocolates, sing to me in a cracked voice.

I couldn't. I had this goldfish, beautiful, in a glass vessel. I'd watch her swim as others would gag me, scorch my chest, weep & fuck me harder. I'd watch this golden bit swim in its glass vessel as they filled me with their goo, or lathered it on my tits, or forced it down my throat.

Then there were two, I'd thought the other died, but no, good news. They talk to me. Sometimes they are not even in the water, singing to me, so vulnerable. Their vessel keeps breaking & they lie in the shards, panting until I collect them. Singing happily to me, my friends, all that's passed by, all lost, regained & more.

Between men I clean my body & their vessel. Fresh water, they let me know too hot or too cold. We work together, as is right.

I begin to show them my life, welcome them deeper into my mind. The massacre I fled from, the Tramp, the pretty boy on the rolling restaurant. The cackling imp.

I show them you, my dearest love, my path, & they understand. They know. They then tell me something. A vision of the sea. A place before I was with the Travelers. It's like a memory of my own they help me to extract from the many lost ones, extract for new.

When he comes, with new dresses, & jewelry to decorate me, me purchased & to be taken away with him, I can't. *I won't*. He talks. Laughs. I tempt as I imagine him crying YOU FUCKING SLUT TAKE IT ALL, but no.

I can't. I urge me friends swim into my eyes for safety, turn away as I raise their bowl high & smash his head. He falls among water & shards, moans, forgives me.

I can't. I drive a large shard into his chest. Again. Fucking again. *Until he won't ever take us*.

My knapsack is in the corner of the room. I undress him & use what of his clothes I can. He's bleeding his last on the dresses & jewelry.

A fragment. Shiny, a little figure broken from something else. A little . . . bear. Reminds me of my imp. I take it. I take him with me in his clothes. I love him. I wish he had entered another cellar seeking his prize. I go.

You're both with me here, tonight, still swimming safely in my eyes, not too hot or too cold. I'll bring you with me, to her. *We'll sing to her*. We'll go.

This woods won't harm us, tonight, now or ever. It's morning. She waits. And now we go.

xviii.

Along came the Traveling Troubadour, long dead but loved by many in the places we travel. I find myself in his company, happily, as many times before, none the how or the why. *What is real? What isn't? What next?*

He laughs & bids me sing for the crowds. He has taught me himself, though more & more his lessons seem like remembering.

Often he tells me to *grasp them by their eyes*, see the music their hearts yearn, *sing it, sing it*. The snapping fires, the low moon lighting trees around us, this is easy & they dance. Learn something, something else, & dance more. He laughs, strums even brighter, nods me more.

Between towns & crowds, I show him my puzzle. I have a blue sheet to write upon, but seem to have trouble. I wish to fill it with all of my fragments which, when assembled, will form a whole, my path to her. He nods, sees my dilemma.



“None, one, & many,” he laughs, almost cackles. Yes, indeed, I nod. *None, one, & many*. He lifts his instrument, strikes a perfect chord, smiles a happy smile, & is gone again, until the next time around.

I wake alone, singing, wrapped in his warm garment around my dead fiancé’s clothes, check, goldfish sleeping lightly in the corner of my eyes, OK. All good. Stand, wash, sing a little. Move on.

xix.

Come the Island, Come the Island,
come the doubt, come me there,
I hesitate, protect me, I doubt.

Lived on the beach, sleep under a collection of branches leaned against a tree. Lay out many days nude to burn, as long as can, find myself relief for want of your touch.

Hesitate, doubt. Protect me.

Watch the full moon with my aching skin & see a face in the moon & the face seems to talk to me alone & it says *click-click! noise-noise! click-click! noise-noise!* in a gnattering tongue I feel like I once knew.

The next night my skin still troubles me & it looks like the tiny imp in the moon has returned to distract me from pain & sleeplessness, gnattering wildly, high & low, urge me too.

The third night I cannot keep awake as my skin no longer aches & I crawl among my branches leaned against the tree. Up in the sky, the moon is too waning for me to see the imp again. But she presses me along to you. *hurry me go*. She loves me, she cackles, she presses me to wake & go.

xx.

Our first time not in a bed or on grass, or by woods, but in the Royal Temple. My dress houses undergarments trimmed for secret entry, hidden pleasures. He hides me there before first light & comes when his morning business is done. Comes alone, lets rumors scatter that he draws nearer the old gods as war with the Mainland approaches. All respect his hours of prayer alone in the Temple.

I kneel between his thighs & arouse his member swiftly. Of all the cocks I have sucked, all the cocks I have received, the gentle, the violent, this is the one that matters, the only one.

I sit on your lap facing you, your hands sliding in through the hidden flaps in my dress, the rest of you sliding in me down below.

You are strong but guide me gently our first time, it feels good. I feel *something* with you in me.

You teach me to moan through our clasped fingers, to keep my eyes shut & see you through our quickening beats & breaths, & faster, & a nebulous climax you lead me in & out of until our hands explode in cry, until our bones shake & our muscles slowly relax. *Fuck.*

I'm let in early in the morning, let out late at night. I don't know by who. But I had already seen you dance, I knew I'd found you.

When he moves me to a private chamber to keep me more elaborately, it doesn't matter.

The goldfish in my eyes swim peacefully, the imp in the moon cackles with this good new play.

I would crumple the King your father as I near you, swear & sweat him & this world away from this skin of mine you will touch, *you will possess.*

xxi.

We are six. No. I know. Yes, we are scattered, even enemy now, but once we came together, walked as one.

We six, raised & summoned from different lands & times, bound for the Island, many years in the binding for this task, to answer for all what if anything could be done to save men—

Could the Tangled Gate undo all the wrong we'd brought to ourselves & our world?

Ours was the fellowship they make the myths from. The one of the great Beast tricked by our Dreamwalker into devouring his head. The one of the woman who bit off the cocks of enchanted seamen until the night she broke her teeth & lost her tongue devouring our brother-sister's image cut in stone.

The later one of the man who walked in crown & dragon's robes, telling of his god's every whim & judgment, deciding lives & deaths with nods & moods, until our brother sang him nude into the Fountain's cheering & clearing waters, him to emerge soft & wide-eyed, with every crumb of the world now mine & yours & all's to share.

A fellowship, broken on the Island, within the Tangled Gate. Not built by men, not the stuff of this world.

It tore us from each other not because malevolent, but because men can only undo men. We cannot undo the elemental forces of this world. Submit, thrash, burn, heal.

Yes, well. This pond I stay is calm at twilight, chipping & whirring of its world at peace. I think about my brothers & I wish we had another hour in the Gate. To submit to its power, yes, but insist our fraternity.

Teach us to know the world, play it, sing it, heal it of us, we are ignorant & rude of these things.

But teach us not how to love one another, for though you consume our bodies, you cannot know our hearts, how a hand's touch stays forever in changing shapes of memory, how a soft word twists into blood & loins, how the very air we breathed that morning as we arrived on the Island still fills & empties our lungs, each of us, tonight, tomorrow, it's cool, calm, we look around, anchor the boat, glad we are near to one another, whatever comes, whatever comes.

When I leave this pond, brothers, I don't know if I will ever find any of you again. And I don't know if any of your master skills were such I learned enough to use well.

But I know this is not my conclusion. We came together to save the world. I haven't forgotten this or any of you. Peace dwells in twilight at this pond, but not in my heart.

xxii.

I was sometimes called the Dreamwalker because I could step in & out of them, like other men a field of lilies & grass, & I could squeeze & shape them to a chunk of wisdom, a word, a message from what knows this world & blows best through its ways.

My brothers would tend me when I woke, sweating, sometimes injured from my travels in Dreamland. It had always been like this, save before them I would tend my wounds alone.

They would wash my body, clean & dress my damage, kisses, caresses. I'd not known men could be so gentle to one another & yet still prefer to lie with women. I too, yet this kind of intimacy moved me, I would try to learn my work better for these brothers.

I would sit with them by evening & tell what I could. Some things would not carry over, would crumble in waking, or in the saying, or even in my brothers' eyes as they watched me, needed me to tell.

As days neared us toward the Island & the Tangled Gate, my dreams went numb of picture, word, advice. My brothers found nothing in my face.

Only one image: a spread of fresh, warm blood on a log, a huge axe falling from the sky, twining it. Seemed a warning but against what? Bleeding? Chopping wood?

We tried something at my begging upon reaching the Island, its shoreless rocky edge. From my pouch the herbs & powders to set me into waking sleep. I followed with the others, in two places at once, trying first to see doubly, then singly.

In dream I was alone, on an Island come alive, coated in fur & teeth, angry, uncalmable, not just intent to consume me, or us, whole, but to efface us, like we never were in the world.

I cry out. A man's sad face, furious too—The Island—its body of the Beast, its face of a sad, furious man—I cry out, & fall down forever.

My brothers all return to me from their explorings, gather me close, each a hand on my trembling form. We are one & together again—

O world's dreaming heart! Why couldn't the Island have consumed us then whole, than spew us like spittle in all directions thereafter?

I feel you still, all of you, my brothers, tending me, waiting my words, even when the only ones I have left, finally, are: *I'm sorry.*

xxiii.

You knew me as he, you knew me as she. We lay together in couples & groups, the road too long for questions that no longer mattered. You held those with you, you loved them, they were lorn. You loved them.

As a girl I waited for the men to find me, I waited, veiled, ruffled, impatient. The universe made my body to play, to think & play, to think & love & play. To figure it all out among hands & eyes & thighs & words part prayer, part lies.

The men found me & I let them chase, let them breathe my scent & sleep alone, let them make canvases by my vague smile, let them caterwaul music from their hard loins.

The men found me & I let a few with a secret smile, moved them to build & to destroy & to calm the fuck down & *to raise back the fuck up.*

The years passed & I needed to know better, to feel it hard entering me, feel that driving thing of empires, gird it soft, feel it raised helplessly by blush & a thigh, need to possess something, have it, fuck it, *fuck it*, rest. Rest softly. Year upon year.

Eventually, what difference? I knew it mattered, knew it, then less so. All flesh is lorn, all flesh needs love, me to help make it so.

My brothers, when the Beast pulled me down to light, I felt the why for it all, remembered again.

We're here for the friction, we're here for the lorn. We're how the world makes its music, what it plays, what it burns.

xxiv.

Before I was King, do you remember? I washed my shirt carefully every day. I slept among the legs & hands & dirty mouths of my own brothers. The ones blood told me were brothers, before I learned my path needed dearer ones to me.

There was no King then. Just groups of men keeping each to its piece. Peace but when a woman

got restless for a new face. We'd heave it out for her claim. Mostly we were too tired working fields for politics.

But some of my dreams I could not bury between randy maidens' thighs, much as I tried. More to this world than working it over like a prize fight.

I asked the old men of the tribe, a tooth among them, they laughed.

Eventually it was the women, full moonlight, tall fires, I made them share with me their drinks neither wine nor water. The long hours showing me years ago, the Island, out there on the horizon, something there, a Gate? They couldn't tell me. They squabbled my cock till each her taste & fill. Then again.

Now knowing something I tried to tell. Something more to this world than dirty hands. The men shook me off for easier lessons of drink & sleeping the world hard off many hours.

I needed new brothers to teach me how listen, teach me how see. New brothers to travel that Island's dream & bring its secrets home.

xxv.

It was in the sea-water we first touched you, by then we were yours. That first day preternaturally bright, the kind quickly dries the lips. I'd said you'd come kind, fast & slower, like a woman's smiling eyes as you followed her hips, like faint water trickling you into a dream. The sea-water as it touched our ankles & knees, as we pulled our small boats ashore.

Then it was the air, it felt like remembering, it felt like private, impossibly private, things to each of us. A touch, a word. A private smell with its private smile.

The air of the Island curled around us in waves that slowly consumed. But a finger on the lips to me, not a word to any or the magic's gone. And it's just a lonely island. *Shh*. Finger on the lips. Not a word.

We camped out that night on the beach, subdued, none of our songs matched those strange patterns of stars, their strange colors.

Our bonfire roared, we six about it, about a mile from one set of warming hands to the next.

I wondered within for a word, felt I should, the others had always nodded kindly to my plants & potions, given me a step & a moment to help if I could.

I close my eyes. I call the Island to me, humbly, I bid it near as I could abide. I present myself for the protection of my brothers, *let me flow through them tonight & always, I pray I flow through & protect you one & all.*



Eyes open. They are looking me close over. A few smile. “This place will fell more of us in the end.” Nod. Laugh.

(Finger on the lips. *Not a word.* Or the magic’s gone.)

xxvi.

I was told first, given my task when I had none, when I had nothing. Another face among leaves & trees. Too many years chasing good ass & then whatever ass. Too many explanations. Too much time.

The voice in my head, I was hungry, lightheaded, pills for meals, pills for sleep. The voice, a young boy’s or a girl’s, humming at first, draw me in lure my mind. Look about, city crowds, we exist to each other by news only our skins & sniffs know. Nothing. The voice sang louder, moved me from brownstones & cobblestones to a park, a bench without light.

“Would you like to do something beautiful? Would you like to save the world? Would you like to feel like the stones, the streams, the wind among nameless things?”

I nodded to this madness, or open door. Nodded & was led back in time, my own times, my canvases, unfinished. Blood canvases, I saw them now & new, saw what they should be, *ahh*, I painted & painted, the voice singing, singing, its light, my path, on & on, it would have been enough, I ate bread & cheese again, I was happy.

I saved, I paid for one, I was particular, long dark hair, blushing cheeks, the fine round ass of a good whore, but little cracked, little tried, unbroken, paid good for her to pose by my chamber’s tall window, laid out in my bed, I’d let her read or doze, or eat tiny candies I’d buy for her in handfuls.

I preferred her not leave, & she didn’t. I dressed her against my weakness but she didn’t view it that way.

I hardened day by day as I painted, moonlight on that hard round whore’s ass, little cracked, little tried. The voice pressing, giving me the choice.

“Would you like to do something beautiful? Would you like to save the world?” I nodded & knew there had to be more. Kept my hands on my brushes. Hard, harder, kept on painting.

The canvases became other, developed a within, a toward, faces, singly at first but then I saw how they were a group. The tall windows of my chamber let in stars & moons & something between them, madness or open door, I nodded, the same faces, canvas after canvas, woods, pale woods, the sea, knowing, near the Island, of course the Island. Always the Island. Always the Gate.

Her legs parted, smiling, glistening.
Moonlit. Perfect.

“Would you like to do something beautiful? Would you like to save the world?”

I nodded & drew us together, at last. Each found the canvas I made for him, in his place & time, studied it, dreamed it day & night until known better than the common light, better than brain, body, beat, breath, knew it & stepped through.

I smoothed & spread her ass that last night before I left, entered her once, twice, *shh*, feel it with me, *yess*, feel it with me, I love you, feel it with me. & goodbye—open wider, there, now, let it all go—& goodbye—

There we were together, our ship, the sea & more sea. Morning. Waking in a cluster, a herd, a batch of wondering faces. What next?

Time to do something beautiful.
Time to save the world.

They knew, these found brothers, that I had brought them here. Called me the Magician but I shook them off. Urged me paint our path, our enemies, beautiful women to dance with. Shook it off worse. *There is only the Island. There is only the Gate.*

My sole canvas aboard that ship showed not the what nor the where of our task but how it would bind us better, & break us finally.

They gathered. Laughed. Then less. New vows.

I made us curl together, again, the night before we arrive the Island. Every man another's hand to his lips, his breast. Someone laughed. Another shushed.

We sailed unknown seas of stars, & songs of boys & girls wished & washed our minds. Night passed. *Coming home, coming home.*

We ranged the Island for days, the stories don't tell this. It wasn't a single day's conquest. We were brave, we were brave, we were less so. The Gate humbled us before it would be found. Farther & farther from the world, lost in mystic pale woods until I listened, begged a little, & listened, & led us the remaining way.

The Gate is none of this world & our skills & tricks & strong hands did us no good. The paths walled by vines & stones hurried & pushed us, no pause, no food, never quite night to rest. We came, straggled, crowded before the cave of the Beast.

Words gone as each of us entered the cave, & was consumed.

Consumed us, singly, & then in all, & I felt the stones, I felt the promised streams, I let go, & more, & all, & now the wind among nameless things. I nodded, smiled, did not return, my brothers, now I am become the canvas upon which you will do something beautiful.

I grant you this music,
I burden you this song.
I don't know if you can, but
you will try & save the world.

xxvii.

Oh, but wait, remember back a little, her, among the adventures we never spoke, gypsy girl, the girl in the graveyard & she was possibly dead, but we each had of her & were less & more.

We had sailed toward the Island for years without discovering sight of it. The maps read, the shamans drunk with, the myth held no live bones.

Pulled our boat into harbor, a city full of taverns, loose a little, put down the weapons & too many maps. We range to different new companions & pursuits. New smells in the nose.

"You're the Dreamwalker," she says to me, young, pretty, but a scar, but a limp, scarves of many sigils, cards on her table, a crystal.

I nod. Imagine licking her scar, her everywhere, then take my drink. My friend's new brew.

"The Island's a dreamer. It dreams the world."

We walk outside, I don't tell my brothers. She sniffs of blue fire, too too blue, & leads me to a graveyard. We lay among effaced stones.

I don't reach for her as I ought, or might, but she gazes the stars & sings me a song.

*There is a door & now we pass through
There is a door & now we pass through
There is a door & now we pass through"*

I sleep. Dream of warm blood on a fallen tree.

I find her while looking for the Dreamwalker. She smiles, & I tense. Bids me sit with her among a cluster of stones. Some say only "from." Some only "to."

"You lay with men & women both?" I nod. She curls into me, her hands soft, curious, benign. "The chasm won't be breached."

The painter joins us, remarks the moonlight, the shadows. She slips from her scarves & skirts

& bids him portray her. Portray us together.

We twine for him & he draws with a shaky hand, shakes his head, cannot render, & goes. She seems to follow, without her clothes.

My brothers are scattered & here is a naked woman in a graveyard. She is scared, limps, scarred but beautiful. I cover her with my cloak.

Now on an ancient bench near the graveyard's gate, she calms, pushes my cloak plainly aside. Urges my hands upon her. "*There is no time.*"

I turn from my games of pegs & chance & find only our youngest brother remains. "They've gone with the gypsy," he says, thin-voiced.

But she's where she's been all night, at her table, her cards, her crystal. Bids me sit. I nod.

"My cards know more than your plants," she says.
 "That may be true. But my plants don't lie."

Her smile rings & rings of power, enough to dance in partner, enough to burn worlds.

Our youngest brother goes to look for the rest & I watch her follow. He'd drunk what I'd given him first. No time for lies. So many beautiful truths.

I find each of us disarrayed as though strong, fine, dirty sex but strangely no sate. We gather ourselves finally before morning's first light.

Nobody knows of the gypsy at the tavern that morning, & the scarves & skirts we seek in the graveyard are discovered colorless scraps.

Our ship finally a refuge from that night & what it tells us. We could search for the Island perpetually, or sacrifice all, finally, each other, & it will reveal.

xxviii.

We lay twined abed, as we have from our first night, & you press me again, smiling blue stars in the velvet space between us, what brought me back, & with my bond of strong brothers, how was it so?

You'd known your own fate from a child. First a girl bleeds she is chosen by one or another. They fight, they trade, one beds me after they drink & hug, maybe they share me that night as a mark of friendship. Each vying to make me moan more helplessly, cry & beg. Begging makes it worse.

So your sister had told you, & aunts, & your own mother with not enough words, & tears.

"It's hard on them, this life. They need to be brutal to us. It *compensates*." She knew such words & their ideas too, but died like none of it mattered. Just the hairy bit between her legs, & his need for *compensation*.

"Then you came." I smile. I'd almost forgotten the scattered tribes of this region. We came on a clue of the Island. But people knew me. They remembered me. "And everyone thought I'd come with a mission of union. My brothers liked it better than I did. They convinced me."

"No. I did." I smack her ass. I could find this flesh candy in the silence of the seas.

"Tell me."

"I dreamed you."

"Dreamed?"

"It seemed of no consequence, a man's yearn who's smelled other men's loins too close too long."

"It wasn't."

"No."

Our first night's camp was near where I'd been a boy. Some remembered, welcomed me, us, some didn't. I saw you at camp & I'd never seen such terror in a girl's eyes. Such hopelessness.

"I told my brothers to keep the men busy, all night, drink & fight them, again & again."

I'm silent a moment, feel her sweat on my heart.

"You wouldn't tell me."

"I had no words. This is what men do. This is what girls are."

"But still you feared. Your heart fought it."

She laughs. "What woman wouldn't choose which man beds her? By a tribal rule? Or by her own fired loins & heart?"

"I didn't intend to take you."

"You'd sniffed me close the first time we passed. I'd already chosen you. I just didn't think it would happen. So his small cock would have your handsome face."

I laugh, helplessly. You've taught me the heaviness & lightness of a woman's wants, of her needs.

"You made me King."

"Your brothers had already decided that. Just lacking was the kingdom."

"When they beheld you my Queen, I now had worth to kneel for!"

She shifts impatiently. Strokes my cock thoughtfully, if that's possible. Moves about in my arms, then leaps back from my known responses.

"Tell me."

"Tell you what? You feel my hardness. Shall I beg again?"

She laughs. Then stops.

"Why were you here? You didn't come to free & unite us. Not originally."

"Why say you?"



"Because girls like me are the spoils of the last standing. You hesitated. Gave me choice."

"I'm not a brute."

"No. And it takes one to ride into settled lands & claim them. Fell the men there or worse let them live servants thereon. *Tell me.*"

I marvel her again & wonder my silence.

"You sought something. Or someone?"

Silence.

"Should I fear you begged another her treats, & she lives still in your heart?"

"No. We rode as brothers looking for a home. We'd bonded by chance, by accident, & vowed to settle. We were ready. Too many limbs among us. Low fires in the heart. We were tired."

You didn't quite believe me. You knew among us six no longer spoken words, wishes, remained. You chose, after all, to love what I could give. Love, loving, kindness. An especial cruel hand to any man who'd have a girl like a tankard. To be drained, bussed by another.

I ruled by your lights, & why you were taken from me is all keeping me alive.

xxviii.

The ancient women have not forgotten me as I visit their dwelling alone. They gather around me in their furs & feathers & finery. The manacle each wears on her left wrist, as reminder.

"Tell me. We don't visit for sentiment."

"There are stranger strengths in this world than most reckon. Hidden paths among dreams, & truck even between life & death."

"Tell me."

The oldest, three hideous bones of a woman, eyes me. "Why did you return?"

"I won't lie. It was chance."

"What were you seeking?"

I look at the manacle on her ancient crust of a wrist & try to think of her, girl in new stained white panties, led off for consumption. *Compensation.*

I sigh. "We sought the Tangled Gate, a bond of men gathered to save the world. But it was vain. Why gather us & not reveal the thing?"

"They were despairing. Becoming saviors to my old homeland saved them, saved all of us."

"Now you despair."

"Yes. And you have help?"

These old crones then spend the last of their blood bone & magick to answer me. A bed the size of my brothers' boat, fires & stars where ceiling'd stolid stood, & them too many to count, & ferocious again in their flesh, mouths to be kissed & sucked, breasts to be squeezed & bitten, shoulders & stomachs & buttocks to be licked, chewed, tendered, hips & maidenhair to be

released in happy moans, laughing howls, & in that night they showed me, each a witchly piece to the whole, the route to the Island, & thus the Gate. *Thus the Gate.*

I woke by sun, chewed, well chewed & battered in dust. Of course they were gone, as though never been. But I knew the way now. It was no noble task for us, some great work of obligation.

We'd been wrong. We'd come to save the world now because we had so much to lose by its passing. Love fights for its right, love sacrifices when it must, but love most seeks to learn best how to live & shows others how.

xxx.

[Having let go the script, again, the Gatekeeper watches, mouths the words as they are spoken]

There is no time. That's what we six learned. What we know still. *There is no time.* We travel rootless paths. Cling to their scenery. We mold to sense impressions, helplessly, & layer upon layer our seeming knowledge.

Our bodies mature like fruit, to new shapes, to deeper within. The path to others sometimes farther, more volatile. Do the lights of the sky understand? Do other creatures of the earth? Can our want flare to knowing, stay?

We accumulated, entering the Cave, filled our bond more & more, seeming, then a falling back, a rupture. A loss.

We'd intended no kingdom & yet it now stood, & those who had raised it were now leaving, a voyage for all humanity, twas said, & though the world seemed prosperous & at its ease, they sailed without further word.

The King now knew the way, he'd summoned us & said. His great hall, its great communal meal table, where we ate with all of our kinsmen, was emptied but for one map.

His eye, his finger on one place, seeming in the open sea.

"There." We looked.

"In the morning."

"How do we land on water?"

"It will be there."

"How will we know?"

He stopped us with a fist upon the table. "It's there. It's what we seek. Guarded, but we will be let in." Then he turned & left, didn't take his map. Didn't need it.

It was our fellowship that allowed us passage. The King traded our love for it. For him, twas no longer save mankind or the world. *Save her.* Bring her back. Her unknown illness. Lack of funeral. No gravesite. We sailed.

Other stories tell of our arrival, the dreams, the dark portents. None tell the rest. *There is no time.*

The Island that was not there came into view the third morning out, & we landed its shoreless rocky edge. Woods, it was covered in an unnavigable pale Woods!

But the King had negotiated our passage. He gathered us the next morning, upon an unliked night of sleep there, closed his eyes, & began to sing. Sing & climb from the rocks & on into the Woods.

We followed him, weapons ready but no foe. A silent Woods to enter, save for our King's crooning.

Twas helpless we followed, our King singing a song not of familiar word or a known tongue, yet moving along without a stumble, while the rest of us were less lucky. He sang us along a seeming invisible path for hours, & impossible to say it led anywhere, & yet did.

It should have been night when we came out, & first beheld the Tangled Gate. Should have, wasn't. It was taller than a castle, & seeming ageless. *Was ageless. There is no time.* We'd yet to learn.

We remarked its legend high above us: "*For those lost.*" Were we? We passed through. There a Fountain, carved & decorated fanatically, beyond mortal crafts. Its waters an invitation. The King gestured us drink. There seemed no choice.

The passage through the Gate was only partly physical. It's this the myths cannot convey. There were no days or nights in the Gate. *There is no time.*

We did not come to the Cave of the Beast by a path, or several. It was arrival without intention. Were there even the paths told of, made of vines & stones? Had we left the Fountain, or the entrance, or had we even left the shoreless rocky lip of the Island?

The King roused us. As a group we'd been slumped by the Cave's entrance. Stupored. He spoke quietly, but with his compelling authority.

"This is why we were brought together. To come here & enter this Cave. We're here to save the world by our worth as men. Our willingness to enter this Cave."

I entered first & found myself of a sudden by the shore of a pond at twilight. The pond was covered in water lilies, & the insect hum rose to my ears. I sat by the water & did not know. There was no way back, as though I hadn't come from anywhere else. This seemed what was intended for me.

I entered next, seeing my brother in the far distance, by a place he'd mentioned sometimes having seen, called it a living painting. Yet I could not retrieve him, & despaired, when I

felt many arms embrace me, touch my face, join my beating, my breath, close my eyes, *my brothers—*

And I came, though what separated one from another of us I could less & less tell. I did not need aid to sleep & wake both for here in the Gate it was these as one forever, it was source, before sunshine, before soil, all was music, all was flow. I smiled.

I came to know & saw the living canvas of my brothers & how I'd come to paint it & I yearned my place! Please let me consume in the this canvas finally & know more than painter & subject, *let all be one, let all be one.*

My King I came last before you & something in this welcoming goo was wrong. I loved my brothers so much but I was trained by Creatures far wiser than we men to sniff & know. As I entered the Cave I sniffed to know & the pain seemed to rip me wide. I sniffed again & again, to calm. My brothers were not in that Cave. Not dead but gone.

When I came out you shrieked wordless at me. You ran past me into the Cave & remained within for three days. I was compelled to stay vigil, no more.

When you came out, that third morning, you were not as I had known. We returned to our ship, unhindered, no path or singing needed. You told me only one thing, "There's no need to mourn them. We know there is no time. So there can be no death."

All I felt was the falling back, the rupture, the loss. I wondered the Gate, then the Island, then the sense of everything & myself.

I broke with you, my King, when I sunk to my knees one night & cried for help. Cried for help a man could conceive, & use. A Savior, to comfort, to explain. A Savior, whether he had ever existed, could now exist. Could comfort & explain hereon. Could bring me along with the rest, where you, my King, my brother, had denied, when you willing sacrificed us all in the Gate.

The emptiness possesses me, even now, as I saw you divide from your kingdom, as I saw you reach back to the Island, as I saw you come to believe there was something there after all to save men, a bargain to be made with whatever Eternals had built that Gate.

I arrayed against you, my King, that others would not follow you, across the waters, on the path that had taken our brothers from us. A path you had designed because *there is no time & she had not died & you could save her even now.* You could still save her & our brothers. The Gate could save us all. *The Gate could save the world.*



To be continued in Cenacle | 88 | April 2014

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Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Charlie Beyer lives in Oreana, Idaho. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 86 | October 2013. Seems we're done for now with his Belize writings, but who knows what crazy sublimities will come next. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. His holiday poem this time is a wonderful counterpoint to Xmas music blasting in malls in October across the land.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. I wish especially for her time for content & meditation in the new year. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 86 | October 2013. It is a pleasure to be publishing excerpts from his *Nighttime Daydreams* work-in-progress. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Nick Meador lives near Detroit, Michigan, and is a welcome new contributor to this journal. His work regularly appears in *Reality Sandwich*, *Disinformation*, and *Beatdom*. He can be found online at <https://www.facebook.com/nicholasmeador>.

Martina Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her website is <http://rollwiththechanges.org>. Martina is not feeling her best these days, & I send along my deepest wishes for healing.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Tom is a model of artistic discipline & craft, a beautifully humble man, & one of the best grandfathers around.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. We first met in person in a bus station ten years ago this month, & our hearts have not parted ways for a single moment since.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. This issue in part marks the 25th anniversary of the Jellicle Literary Guild, *The Cenacle's* kindred project. I am very happy they appear together four times a year, completely in tune.

W. B. Yeats was born in Ireland in 1865 & died in France in 1939. He is rightly considered one of the greatest poets of the English language. His poetry in this issue was also reprinted in a volume in the 2002 Burning Man Books series (<http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>).

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A black and white photograph of a night scene. In the upper half, a bright moon is partially obscured by dark, wispy clouds. In the lower half, a dark road or path leads into the distance, flanked by a fence and some vegetation. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

We must strive to be
Be like the moon
To be kind
Distracted by its tune

'Cause these days are numbered
This life absolute
We all complain if it rains or it shines
But we're never mad at the moon.

-- The Head and the Heart

